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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE EXPERIENCES OF MISSISSIPPI WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS AS THEY
EXPLORE AND CONSIDER PRODUCING INTERNET EDITIONS

by

Cassandra Denise Johnson

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2010

ABSTRACT

THE EXPERIENCES OF MISSISSIPPI WEEKLY NEWSPAPER EDITORS AS THEY EXPLORE AND CONSIDER PRODUCING INTERNET EDITIONS

by Cassandra Denise Johnson

December 2010

This dissertation focused on the challenges Mississippi weekly newspaper editors faced when deciding to have an online edition and the issues these editors encountered when they adopted a Web newspaper. The study expounded on four areas – the operational changes weekly newspapers have had to make to produce Web editions, the different type of newsroom staff that are needed to create both editions, the content that is going in the online edition, and the financial pressures that editors work through to keep the newspapers profitable. The study was modeled after similar studies from three organizations – the Pew Research Center, the Bivings Group, and the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI). The researcher conducted a sequential mixed-methods research process involving a survey, interviews, and a case study among Mississippi weekly newspaper editors.

This current study suggests that Mississippi weekly newspapers have not experienced the innovation with Internet newspapers that participants in the aforementioned studies had. In fact, results indicate that Mississippi weekly editors can be divided into three categories based on their experiences with Internet editions. A large group of weekly newspaper editors still do not have an Internet edition, nor do they intend to ever have one. The biggest group of editors has scaled back Internet versions that are merely cut-and-paste replicas of their printed newspapers. The smallest group has

found creative ways to present news content online and to make money from the Web editions. Mississippi weekly editors also insisted that daily newspaper editors should follow their pattern of producing news if the daily editors want their newspapers to survive. Results also explain that Mississippi weeklies are not doing any more than they ever have in the way that they produce news and that weekly newspapers are in a better position than daily papers to survive financially. Based on these findings, directions for future scholarly research in this area are presented.

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
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December 2010

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Today’s newspapers are in a situation where they must embrace new technologies in order to stay relevant and survive” (Bivings Group, 2008, p. 2).

The San Jose *Mercury Center* is credited as being the first newspaper in the United States to produce a “full-content” Internet edition, meaning it was the first daily newspaper to publish its full editorial and classified advertising content on the Web in 1993 (Lewis, 2005, p. 4). *Mercury Center* chairman and publisher Jay T. Harris called their move to an online format “bold and forward-thinking” (Business Wire, 1996, n.d.). Several other electronic strategies of disseminating news to consumers had been attempted prior to then, but it was not until the San Jose edition, entitled *Mercury Center*, that a newspaper officially could say it was publishing a complete edition online. With the Center’s success, other newspapers across the nation lagged in producing online editions. Today, thousands of newspapers publish a Web version of their newspapers.

For Mississippi, the first online weekly newspaper surfaced in some form about six years after the *Mercury Center* edition. A decade later, nearly every daily newspaper in the state produces an online edition to accompany its print version, and most weeklies are experimenting with the innovation. In fact, of the 102 total newspapers in the state (daily and weekly), 75% of them now have online editions (Mississippi Press Association, 2009).

The greatest concerns many newspaper executives have had with publishing an online edition are in four areas – operations, content, staffing, and funding (McCombs, 2003; Morris, 2000; Rejkef, 2005; Tracy, 2005; Tsai, 1998; Wilson, 2008; Yoo, 2003). Editors have considered how an Internet edition will change the way they do things, what

they put in the newspaper, how their staffs will handle the edition and how to fund and make money from it. Newspapers are still in a trial-and-error period in all of these areas. Facing declining advertising and print-edition readership, newspaper editors and publishers are grappling with ways to increase their circulation and revenue via the Internet. However, editors find it much easier to pay for and make money from a print edition than to rethink how they should operate in an online environment or how to revamp their content for an online audience. The task is especially difficult at weekly newspapers that already operate with smaller budgets and staffs than their daily and metropolitan counterparts. Some weekly newspaper editors have decided that their newspapers are not ready for the Web. Several factors hinder and delay their decision to expand electronically.

This study focuses on those distinct challenges weekly newspaper editors face when approaching the Web in a more technologically-driven society. The purpose of this research is to present an overview of the state of weekly Internet newspapers in Mississippi and document the experiences of weekly newspaper editors as they explore and consider producing Internet versions of their newspapers. The study explored four areas – (a) the operational changes that newspapers have had to make as a result of producing Web editions, (b) the evolution of a news staff that can handle both editions, (c) the content that is transforming to suit an online format and online readers, and (d) the financial pressures that editors work through to keep the newspapers profitable. The research delved into the thoughts weekly newspaper editors have had in leading their staffs to publish an online edition and the decisions that go into producing Web newspapers. It determined that Internet newspapers are not necessarily improving

journalism for weekly newspapers. It is hoped that analyzing the responses of weekly newspaper editors in one state will provide generalizations for editors as a whole as they interact with the Internet.

Because of the wealth of Internet newspapers in the nation, this exploration was limited to Mississippi weekly publications. The researcher chose weekly newspapers because those that are not corporately owned have more flexibility of changing. Therefore, it would be important to note why these editors have not chosen to transform when they have the freedom to change. Additionally, scholars have overlooked weekly newspapers, despite their success record, in their studies over the years (Coulson, Lacy, & Wilson, 2001). The researcher chose to study Mississippi because it was identified by the U.S. Census Bureau (2002) as having the lowest Internet penetration rate in the nation and labeled in a Pew Internet and American Life Survey (Spooner, 2003) as part of the lowest group of states that trail the rest of the nation's states in Internet access penetration. Hence, Mississippi newspapers would encounter a greater challenge of integrating Internet editions into their communities.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the state of community Internet journalism in Mississippi and the Web experiences of Mississippi weekly newspaper editors-publishers. Six main research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How have Mississippi weekly newspapers changed their operation processes to publish Internet editions?

RQ1a: Has there been an increase in the number of hours staff has to work to produce an online edition?

RQ1b: Has there been an increase in the number of staff members needed to publish an online edition?

RQ1c: Are newspapers taking the time to train existing staff to publish the online edition or are they hiring new staff members who already possess those skills?

RQ2: How have Mississippi weekly newspaper staffs evolved to publish an online edition?

RQ2a: What are the demographics of staff who work on the print and online editions?

RQ2b: What are the demographics of the editors leading newspapers that produce an online and print edition?

RQ2c: What skills were not previously required of staff that are now needed for the online editions?

RQ3: How is content changing from print editions to Internet versions in Mississippi weekly newspapers?

RQ3a: Does the Internet edition incorporate less or more content than the print edition?

RQ3b: What content is unique to each edition?

RQ3c: Are Internet edition stories and advertising content presented the same as in print?

RQ3d: Are there more graphics and visual information on the online edition?

RQ4: How much is it costing Mississippi weekly newspapers to publish an Internet edition and how much are they making from them?

RQ4a: What costs are associated with Internet publication?

RQ4b: What are newspapers planning to charge for content?

RQ4c: What are newspapers planning to charge to access archives?

RQ4d: Are newspapers offering any bundled packages to encourage advertising in both the online and print editions?

RQ5: What barriers do Mississippi weekly newspaper editors believe there are to publishing Internet editions in non-metro communities?

RQ6: What do Mississippi weekly editors foresee as the future of Internet newspapers in the state?

The answers to these questions will provide an overall view of Mississippi weekly newspapers' use of the Internet, identify factors that go into the decision-adoption process of editors, explore ways weekly newspaper editors lead their staffs to produce online editions, and determine what newspaper editors have been doing right or what they can do better to lead their newspapers technologically in the future. Using Pew Research Center reports, the Bivings Group data and a Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) 2009 survey as guidelines, this study proposes that editors struggling to keep their newspapers afloat may be looking for direction in the wrong places. Research is showing that smaller (weekly) newspapers, not larger metropolitan ones, are seeing the greatest benefit of publishing online (Pew Research Center, 2008). Therefore, this study is an attempt to determine whether Mississippi weeklies are as innovative as the national studies suggest and if they should serve as models for larger newspapers.

Organization for the Remainder of the Study

The following chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the current study. The remaining research chapters are broken down as follows: Chapter III presents the research methodology, including a description of mixed methods research. Additionally, data collection procedures and analysis is presented. Chapter IV provides an overview of Mississippi community journalism and the experiences of editors and publishers in the form of survey results and interview results as they relate to operations, staffs, content, and finances of the Internet newspaper. Chapter V is a case study of one weekly Mississippi newspaper that is doing extremely well online in terms of its operations, staff, content, and finances. Chapter VI presents conclusions and discussion of findings, particularly addressing the future of Mississippi weekly newspaper Internet journalism based on the predictions of editors. This chapter also offers recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the emergence of Internet newspapers, the state of community (weekly) journalism, and the Internet newspaper issues editors are encountering through the existing literature. The chapter concludes with a summary that ties the literature to the current study.

Literature Review

Scholars have studied weekly/community newspapers and Internet newspapers from various perspectives. Researchers have investigated how media concentration affects the local weekly newspaper (Murdock, 2008), the ethical dilemmas of publishing a weekly edition in a small town (Coble-Krings, 2005), how people derive community identity from weekly newspapers (Branner, 2005), the nature and extent of the weekly newspaper industry (Coulson, Lacy, & Wilson, 2001), and the attitudes of journalists toward market-driven journalism at weekly papers (Gross, 2005). Some (Kierans, 2004) have conducted case studies of specific newspapers. Others have examined the content of weekly newspapers (Lacy, Robinson, & Riffe, 1995) and the impact of competition on advertising rates at weeklies (Coulson, Lacy, & Wilson, 2001). In regards to Internet newspapers, some researchers have approached the topic in terms of their effects on users (Ketterer, 2000), their accessibility (Xu, 2005) and even how they enhance the political process (Williams, 2008). Some have explored their content (Tsai, 1998; Wilson, 2008), and a number of researchers have traced their invention and development at particular newspapers (Lewis, 2005). Furthermore, scholars have also examined Internet newspapers from a financial standpoint and what their creation means to their print

counterparts (Baltes, 2003). However, this study fills a gap in literature by combining the two areas – weekly newspapers and the Internet. Only a few studies exist that join both (Adams, 2007; Lowrey, 2003; Scarborough, 1996), and even fewer approach the combination from a qualitative perspective. This study also presents scholarship on Internet newspapers from managements' perspective than from Internet newspaper characteristics, Internet newspaper uses and accessibility or audience effects.

This study is important because it offers an extensive look into the viewpoints and Internet experiences of weekly newspaper editors in one state. It will be heavily modeled on research from the Pew Research Center and the Bivings Group, private organizations that have both researched the use of the Internet by American newspapers and the changing newsroom as a result of the Internet. These reports are useful because they, though professional research reports, offer closely aligned research to this study. This research carries significant practical importance as it will allow newspaper editors to see and possibly implement strategies that could help them improve the quality or production process of their newspapers and motivate their staffs to rise to new challenges. A look into the thinking of weekly newspaper editors could also serve as a model for editors at larger, metropolitan newspapers that are struggling to stay afloat.

A survey of the literature reveals less than a handful of studies that directly relate to the one being proposed. Very few studies examine the Internet newspaper operations at weekly newspapers. Two studies in particular are exceptionally similar. In many ways, this study was patterned after one Scarborough (1996) conducted over 10 years ago that explored the effects of electronic newspapers on small town weekly newspaper editors in rural Alabama. Scarborough's research is one of the most elaborate academic studies

about rural weekly newspapers and the Internet. That study, having been published when electronic newspapers were in their infancy, needs expansion. The thesis uncovers the thoughts of Alabama weekly newspaper editors toward electronic newspapers and their predictions for them using Diffusion of Innovations Theory. At the time of the study, most of the newspapers surveyed had not progressed through the five stages of diffusion, and diffusion study was fairly fresh. The majority of newspaper editors were knowledgeable of Internet editions, but most had no plans of starting one. It is fitting that the study be revised and updated since electronic newspapers have grown a great deal in usage and popularity since that study was conducted.

Similarly and more recently, Adams (2007) conducted a nationwide survey examining how weekly newspaper editors produce and supervise their online newspapers. Most respondents viewed the Internet editions as supplements to the print edition that would help boost readership and revenue of the print editions. Like Scarborough's study, Adams' study was a quantitative effort that does not thoroughly delve into the reasons why or processes by which weekly newspaper editors lead their staffs in this technological step of publishing an Internet edition. This researcher's proposed dissertation differs from the two aforementioned studies by being a mixed method research approach that offers a comprehensive search into the reasoning of weekly newspaper editors as they approach the Web.

This researcher's study is especially important now that fewer than half of all Americans are reading a daily newspaper on a regular basis (Pew Research Center, 2008). The falling numbers are happening "across the board" among races, gender and educational levels (Pew Research Center, 2008, p. 17). The only recognizable difference

is in age, where young people, particularly those under 25, are reading newspapers considerably less than those 50 and older. Those in the 25-to-34 age group are reading online newspapers more than print newspapers. In spite of this, the audience for the local weekly newspaper has remained steady.

The declines in readership are coupled with other problems – staffing cuts and reducing space and resources allocated to various subjects. According to a Project for Excellence in Journalism report by the Pew Research Center (2008), the problems are greater at larger newspapers, but smaller newspapers are not immune. “The forces buffeting the industry continue to affect larger metro newspapers to a far greater extent than smaller ones. In some cases, these differences are so stark it seems that larger and smaller newspapers are living two distinctly different experiences” (Pew Research Center, 2008, p. 2). The Pew center conducted interviews and a survey of senior news executives from 259 newspapers across the country. The sample included more than half of all newspapers with circulations over 100,000 and approximately one-third with circulations between 50,000 to 100,000. More than one in every five of the nation’s 1,217 daily newspapers participated. Researchers wanted to determine what coverage and beats were disappearing, what knowledge had been lost and what expertise had come into newsrooms in light of having Internet editions and a struggling economy (Pew Research Center, 2008).

The Pew Research Center report (2008) maintains that the economic and technological challenges facing newspapers have forced the culture of newspapers to change as well. While there is a departure of some reporting skills, there is an influx of other skills, mostly technological, as a result of Internet editions. The study shows more

seasoned, veteran journalists are being replaced with technologically capable journalists with fresh ideas. Expertise, journalistic talent and knowledge of core journalistic principles are being swapped for technological know-how, according to the report. Sadly, the top skills being lost at most newspapers in this exchange are editing and photography. Papers surveyed in the Pew study reported copy desk editors, photographers and general assignment reporters as the top three category cutbacks they have had to make. In addition, newsroom staffs are smaller, younger, more tech-savvy, and more oriented to working on both print and online editions. The staff is distant from the community it serves and unaware of individual beats and how to gather news. Furthermore, there are fewer editors to catch mistakes (Pew Research Center, 2008).

What are being gained in this trade are journalists who are trained to produce material that can be spread across various venues (print newspaper, online edition, television shows, etc.). At some newspapers, the changes in newspaper operation have created the mobile journalist (or “Mo Jo” for short), who rarely sets foot into the newsroom but works in the field to file content directly to the newspaper’s website. Editors at larger papers also predict greater danger for the future as opposed to those at smaller newspapers. The study suggests two completely different experiences, with smaller newspapers apparently better anchored into their communities and with more deeply involved readership enjoying greater stability (Pew Research Center, 2008).

Other professional organizations, like the Bivings Group, have studied the changing newsroom as a result of technological change. The Bivings Group is an Internet communications firm that helps clients “use technology to identify, engage and communicate with the audiences that matter most to them” (Bivings Group, 2008, n.d.).

The group conducted two consecutive yearly studies (2007 and 2008) to evaluate how well American newspapers were taking advantage of new Internet technology. In the studies, researchers examined the websites of America's top 100 newspapers by circulation and evaluated them based on the presence or lack of many online features. The organization determined that newspapers are doing what they can to survive in this age. Newspapers in the Bivings Group's (2007) study are continuing to take advantage of the tools offered to them by new technology. They are aggressively expanding their website features and experimenting with new technology to attract and keep readers. The 2008 Bivings Group report showed a tremendous increase in newspapers using social bookmarking tools and user-generated content to evolve from simple news sites into community portals. Additionally, Internet newspapers have seen increases in PDF editions, RSS feeds and some form of online advertising and decreases in sites requiring registration to view content. A PDF edition is a two-dimensional document of the newspaper that a reader can download and print.

According to the organization, the results imply that newspaper employees' attitudes toward the Web have changed.

Rather than focusing on every Internet trend, newspapers have been focusing on only those that would improve their relationship with the readers and expanding the page views for their articles. Now, rather than a threat to readership, the newspaper industry is starting to try to use the Internet to build online communities around their publications.. (Bivings Group, 2008, p. 23)

In addition, many newspapers continue to keep their content behind (free or paid) registration walls, preventing users from accessing articles without first disclosing

personal information (Bivings Group, 2008).

One final organization – the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) – conducted a study in 2009 that also serves as a guideline for this study. The difference between this research and the RJI study is that study polled daily editors while this one explored the experiences of weekly editors. RJI surveyed 970 daily newspaper editors and 869 reporters between December 2008 and February 2009. The study's four main findings were: (a) editors and reporters said the Web has made print and online journalism better; (b) journalists have handled the challenges of multimedia journalism well; (c) journalists' organizations operate their Web and print editions as integrated products suited to different formats, rather than separate publications; and (d) editors and reporters are getting the training they need to work on online editions (Fleming, 2010).

This dissertation warrants background research to be compiled in two areas – community journalism (weekly newspapers) and Internet newspapers. There is little research that exists that addresses both subjects in the same study. There is especially a lack of research about Internet weekly newspapers in rural areas. Most studies have concentrated on the Internet editions of newspapers in larger, metropolitan areas. This research provides an ideal opportunity to examine scholarly efforts from both topics, combine them, and fill a gap in the field. The first area of exploration is community (weekly) newspaper journalism.

Community Journalism Research

Community journalism has at its core a focus on community relationships. What distinguishes it from journalism practiced at larger, metropolitan newspapers is its ability to show, through its coverage and employees' involvement in the community, that the

residents it serves are what matter most. Metropolitan newspapers make attempts to serve their communities, but the type of coverage they offer is just not the same. Scholar Jock Lauterer (2006) declares that community journalism can be easily recognized in smaller newspapers – weeklies and small-market dailies. According to Lauterer (2006), the community newspaper is the heart of many American cities. He defines a community newspaper as “a publication with a circulation under 50,000, serving people who live together in a distinct geographical space with a clear local-first emphasis on news, features, sports, and advertising” (p. 1). Lauterer (2006) distinguishes community newspapers, often called weekly or small newspapers, as weeklies and small dailies. Weeklies are typically published once a week, twice a week or once every two weeks. There are three types of weeklies – family-owned, chain-owned, and urban/issue-oriented. The family-owned paper is an independent operation in which the owner is active and interested in both the community and the newspaper. The chain-owned weekly is managed by a local publisher, but the owner is a corporation or organization. The urban or issue-oriented paper caters to a target market with a focus on issues, causes, lifestyles, environment, etc. (Lauterer, 2006). For the purposes of this study, the research will focus only on weekly editions that are family- or chain-owned, since there are few issue-oriented weeklies in Mississippi.

Others declare that the definition of community newspapers, and community journalism in general, should not be limited to geographical areas. Taylor (2007) posits that geographic location does not define the community newspaper because many are not restricted to suburban or urban locations. He determined that there are two factors that distinguish community newspapers – their local emphasis on information and their non-

daily publication. According to Taylor, community journalism comes from “any print news publication organization, regardless of circulation size or geographic location, which does not publish on consecutive days and has local content as its primary editorial and advertising focus” (p. 13). Lowrey, Brozana, and Mackay (2008) explain community journalism as

the degree to which a media outlet helps make a community’s institutions, facilities, resources, and spaces more visible, accessible and easy to use; the degree to which the media outlet seeks, fosters, and allows diversity of viewpoints; and the degree to which the media outlet strives to integrate viewpoints into a cohesive representation that is intelligible to community members. (p. 289)

Lauterer (2006) declares that a community newspaper has much more to offer residents than a larger paper does. What a community newspaper supplies is “the affirmation of the sense of community, a positive and intimate reflection of the sense of place, a stroke for us-ness, our extended family-ness and our profound and interlocking connectedness” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 33). Lauterer (2006) offers several distinguishable traits of a community newspaper and its staff:

- A community newspaper depends on its own scarce resources for survival.
- The publisher and editor are known community members who can be approached in public by residents about something in the paper.
- The staff and their families are members of the same local organizations and churches as the rest of the community.

- The staff makes approximately the same amount of money as most of the community residents. (p. 33)

While a community newspaper strives to serve its population, the newspaper staff deals with pros and cons of being part of a small newspaper. One advantage is that the staff encounters fewer levels of bureaucracy. An editor can quickly make decisions that are in the best interest of the newspaper and the community. The cost to operate the newspaper may not be as immense either. For that reason, it is not as expensive to introduce technology at a community newspaper as it would be at a metropolitan paper. A small operation also makes it possible to take issues to management easier. In most cases, their staffs are not nearly the size of their daily counterparts, and they operate on a great deal less money. A disadvantage for staffs of small newspapers is that they have more responsibilities. Everyone is expected to do his or her share of the work and then some, which limits the amount of time one can spend specializing in an area (Lauterer, 2006).

Scholars have examined community newspapers from several perspectives. They have evaluated community newspapers in terms of whether journalists thought market-driven journalism affected their news content (Gross, 2005), if community identity surrounding such newspapers can be captured, and whether it is important for a newspaper staff to be visible and active in a community to establish community identity (Branner, 2005). Other researchers have explored the dilemmas journalists at weekly newspapers face when they form close ties with the community (Coble-Krings, 2005). Kierans (2004) studied the relationship of three Canadian weeklies with their

communities, and Murdock (2008) posits that conglomerate, not individual, ownership may be the best option for weeklies to survive in today's competitive media environment.

Taylor (2007) conducted a similar study to the one this research proposes in which he conducted case studies of Internet technology usage at three Tennessee community newspapers. He wanted to depart from the research of Hindman, Ernst, and Richardson (2001) in which they focused solely on editors' use of Internet technology within social contexts and the research of Boczkowski (2004) in which he identified key factors that shaped the integration of new interactive and multimedia technology into the online news product. Instead, Taylor (2007) sought to determine the production effect that technology such as the Internet had on how workers perform their daily tasks and how the technology affected the overall community newspaper he researched. Results showed that the newspaper staff exhibited consistent use, understanding, and confidence in dealing with technology, and newspaper leaders were more knowledgeable about the presence and use of technology of their newspapers than he expected. Leadership was willing and able to engage the issue of technology integration in the community newspaper. Perhaps what was most useful to the present study is research that showed that technology adoption at the newspapers generated structural and procedural consequences for the organizations. In general, technology adoption alters organizational structure and task performance processes for personnel at community newspapers.

Internet Newspaper Research

The second area that needs exploring related to this study is Internet newspapers. Background research in this section is divided into several areas – content; interactivity; community/relationships; audience uses, effects, and access; political coverage; financial

aspects; and reporter role. Lewis (2005, p. 5) defines Internet, or online newspapers, as “newspaper content provided specifically by newspapers and sent to a general audience primarily through an Internet connection and computer modem.” Mensing (1997, p. 8) points out that there are several terms used interchangeably that these newspapers are called – “online, interactive, and electronic.” Their function is clear, though. They all “refer to structured digital publications that include text and graphics, and are accessible to readers via computer on a daily basis” (Mensing, 1997, p. 8). Though the online newspaper is several years old, scholarship on the topic is in its infancy. Lewis (2005) evaluated the *Mercury Center*, one of the few newspapers that scholars and newspaper professionals have recognized as being an innovator in online newspaper development. It took more than employee desire for that online edition to become a reality. According to Lewis, the San Jose *Mercury Center* became a leader in online newspaper development because it staffed progressive thinkers and it had already established an online presence among “a community and corporate culture that was technologically oriented” (p. 213).

Tracy (2005) outlined the development of the online newspaper at a different newspaper and how it adapted its product to new technologies. The researcher determined that there are no adequate terms to describe the technological shift that occurs when print newspapers transition to the Internet. She implies that terms such as “revolutionary” and “evolutionary,” which have been used to describe the switch, are overrated for this new medium. She suggests that online newspapers are merely the byproduct of what newspapers have been subjected to since their inception – new technologies. What Tracy does recommend is a present-day definition of news that abandons rigid, age-old formulas for creating and disseminating news. “Solutions to the

structural problems and those of definition will come from the shift of a less hierarchical, linear, and chronological construct to a networked, decentralized structure for the creation and delivery of news” (Tracy, 2005, p. 76). Other scholars have managed to perform Internet newspaper studies in the areas of content, interactivity, community and relationships, among others.

Online Content

Researchers have examined the content of online newspapers from various approaches. Studies have focused on everything from the manner that newspapers tell stories on the Internet (Tsai, 1998) to the way the content of one individual paper varies before and after the adoption of the Internet edition (Wilson, 2008). Today, it should be understood that the content of online newspapers is as diverse as the newspapers and communities they serve. However, that was not always the case. Some scholars and news professionals have indicated over the years that newspapers have not done a good job of varying the content between their print and online editions. They report that newspapers in past times simply cut and pasted with no changes or enhancements the content in their print editions to their Web editions. Scholars termed the phrase “shovelware” to explain that the content was merely “shoveled” from the print newspaper to the Internet version.

Even when the material in the newspaper has been as differentiated as environmental topics (Randazzo, 2001), some newspapers have not taken full advantage of the potential of the Web to enhance their coverage and presentation of issues. When Morris (2000) evaluated the way journalists at three newspaper Web production sites decided which stories to put online, he concluded there was little difference in story type. The mere cut-and-paste replication of print content to online editions may not be a

practice isolated to American newspapers, either. Souza (2003) discovered that Nigerian newspapers were using the same shoveling method to get content on the Web editions as well. Tsai (1998) and Yoo (2003) pointed out gradual shifts from “shovelware” to more varying features in online newspapers years after the formation of Internet newspapers. There were even signs that a new storytelling form, “nonlinear storytelling,” was starting to emerge despite editors in Tsai’s study believing there was no need to form a new writing style for the Internet. Nonlinear storytelling is “an online storytelling technique a journalist uses when he or she organizes the information into various clickable subjects that lead the readers to textual, graphic or audio content, rather than a text that flows in linear succession” (Tsai, 1998, p. 59).

Research from scholars showed that online newspapers started to provide slightly more news content, more related articles, and longer headlines than print papers around 2003 (Yoo, 2003). Online newspapers also showed considerable disparities in topic, geographical coverage, and news sources from their print editions and relied more on wire and syndicated services to publish news immediately. Yoo (2003) suggests limited newspaper staffs and budgets may have prohibited online newspapers from producing the kinds of product they are now capable of publishing. The miniscule differences must have just been happening at conventional, not niche, newspapers. When Choi (2004) analyzed public journalism at online and print newspapers a year later, the content was the same. Choi (2004, p. 25) agreed, saying, “It is safe to say that most online newspapers have too limited staff and resources for the time being to be able to utilize the new medium’s unique capabilities.” Still, others have conducted research that indicates that online newspapers provide content that only reinforces print content (Hoffman, 2006).

Niche newspapers are taking advantage of the Internet as a means to offer content that appeals to a specific group of consumers. Wood (2004) was among the first to study niche newspaper websites and identify factors that influenced whether an online newspaper created a specialized site. The researcher's "Communicator-Based Hierarchy-of-Effects Model" offers a quantitative guideline to help newspaper managers market and supervise these niche sites successfully to achieve consumer brand loyalty.

Newspaper Interactivity

Research regarding the interactive features and capabilities of online newspapers has garnered considerable study, too. Some scholars have figured out that online newspaper staff members are not actively using their interactive features to initiate discourse with their readers because of journalists' lack of skill and their uncertainty about their journalistic role to do so (Wimmer, 2000). Interactivity has been defined as a collaborative process of "online journalists connecting their intent to readers and readers connecting their intent to online journalists" (Wimmer, 2000, p. 5) or simply "the exchanges between reader and journalist" (Tsai, 1998, p. 10). Wimmer's (2000) study proposes "facilitative exchange" as a means for online newspaper staffs to fill their pages and meet budgetary needs in this technological age. Online newspapers were still not initiating communication with readers in 2006, six years after Wimmer's (2000) suggestion. Pedersen (2006) concluded that online newspapers were not using the interactive features they could be using – links, images, video, and audio – to involve their readers as part of newspaper discourse. Most were still not offering a way for users to interact with the content on online editions.

Other scholars have studied whether the interactive features of the Internet could be beneficial to a newspaper in other ways. Ban (1999) wanted to see if using interactivity and hyperlinks could rebuild public trust regarding news. Hyperlinks are “words identified as connectors between the node [section] currently being read and an organizationally or rationally connected node” (Ban, 1999, p. 20). Hyperlinks help users jump into and out of documents and Web pages with a simple word click. The study revealed that online journalism, with its interactive and hyperlink features, alone cannot rebuild public trust. Instead, online journalists have to put forth the effort to rebuild confidence.

Lin (2002) sought to understand if there was a relationship between these interactive features and perceived interactivity on the attitudes and behavioral intentions of Internet newspaper users. The study revealed that the more interactive features a website has, the more interactive an individual perceives it to be. Also, an individual’s comfort level with the Internet correlated with behavioral intentions. Ironically, findings suggest that people who prefer traditional media, like print newspapers, spent more time on Internet sites than Internet-oriented users. Interactivity continues to be studied as more scholars and news professionals begin to see the advantages of it. Some have examined it in terms of its relation to classified advertising (Farebrother, 2005), factors affecting it at newspaper websites (Li & Zeng, 2006), and whether it even exists on some Internet newspaper pages (Pedersen, 2006).

Community/Relationships

The communities and relationships online newspapers establish lend themselves to further research. Mersey (2007) wanted to see if Internet newspapers, with their

potential to reach a broader audience, heightened readers' sense of community and brought them closer together. This study determined that the Internet may not be as powerful as the print newspaper in uniting people in a particular geographic area together. Likewise, Fedak (2007) examined how one newspaper was working to establish a sense of community through its Web edition. Salido's (2000) study revealed that gender may be a factor in the bond users have with Internet newspapers. Males are more likely to be affectively attached than women to Internet newspaper communities.

Uses, Effects, and Access

Research is increasing in the area of uses and effects of Internet newspapers. Some scholars have studied the reading habits of younger consumers to determine their reasons for reading Internet newspapers (Jeong, 2004). Along those same lines, Anderson (2007) found that University of Missouri-Columbia students turned to online newspapers as the primary source of certain news subjects (excluding local and regional news) over television news and print newspapers. Other scholars have explored how Internet newspapers have been stimulated by traditional media (Meyer, 2006) and how they have created a voice for citizen journalism targeting neighborhood news without the strict gatekeeping restraints of traditional media (Boyles, 2006). There could also be differences in how men and women utilize Internet newspapers. Swamy (1997) discovered that men are more likely to use different online services than women.

Additionally, researchers have analyzed the accessibility of online newspapers. Xu (2005), in wanting to find a way to make online newspaper content accessible to those with visual disability issues, studied how images were used on the pages of American online newspapers and how that usage affected content accessibility. Ketterer (2000)

examined if users' perceptions of crime stories in online newspapers were affected by hypertext links, story type, and personality variables. Results show participants reading stories with links spent more time reading and were better informed than those who did not have links. Numerous other scholars have contributed to newspaper research in the area of uses, effects, and access (Chyi & Lasorsa, 1999; Li & Zeng, 2006; Sundar, 1998).

Political Studies

Narrowly-focused studies have dealt with the political aspects of Internet newspapers. Mensing (2001) compared the traditional and online news coverage of the 2000 presidential primary and determined that emphasis, style, content, and presentation of political news changes significantly online from print newspapers. Rosenberry (2005) focused more on a framework of normative practices that online journalists could use to help them serve the self-governing society of the United States more effectively. The framework would help citizens become more engaged in the political process, and thus, improve political communication between those seeking power and those who will be served. Williams (2008) examined how the rise of the Internet has influenced the decisions audiences make about where and how to access newspapers using data surrounding the 2004 presidential election. Results showed audiences' involvement with newspapers differs, both attitudinally and behaviorally, between online and print coverage.

Financial Aspects

One area that continues to puzzle researchers and newspaper managers is how newspapers will continue to survive financially when most offer their content on the Web for free. Mensing (1997) identified several revenue streams – subscriptions, advertising

(the largest revenue source), premium services (such as subscribing to the archives of the paper, e-mail delivery of editions, etc.), providing Internet access, local and national alliances, Web design services, micropayments (buying stories one at a time) and transaction potential (the possibility of gaining payment upon delivering customers to advertisers via the website) – that keep Internet newspapers alive. At the time of the study, few newspapers were not self-supported, and it was unclear how long they would financially survive unless they formed and implemented business plans for publishing online. Aside from just giving away content, newspapers are competing with other forms of media for audience attention. The Bivings Group (2008) has conducted annual studies the past few years to determine how newspaper websites are evolving with the challenges they are facing. They concluded that newspapers no longer have domination in their markets. “Readers have many more news options – and almost all are free” (Bivings Group, 2008, p. 2).

In addition to those challenges, newspapers are facing declining advertising revenue, which traditionally has been the main source of income for many newspapers. Most publishers, reluctant to stray from the same business model that has worked for their print newspapers, do not know how to make money with the online editions. For them, advertising has been and continues to be their sole means of survival. Rejkef (2005) proposed authentication (registration, subscription, pay-per-use – methods newspaper sites use to control access to their products) and customization (personalized news content) as ways online newspapers can thrive economically apart from advertising. Results show newspaper managers are still testing these methods, and there is no clear evidence on how they will fit into their individual business model. Yet, the fact remains

that the majority of online newspapers have no methodical plan for making money (Harper, 1996). Unfortunately, many newspaper executives are fretting over whether they can thrive on the Internet.

Pew Research Center (2008) researchers surveyed what they estimated to be one in five of 1,217 daily newspapers and found that many newspapers have reduced their full-time staffs over the previous three years, mainly because of financial pressures. Newspapers with larger circulations were being hit harder than those with smaller numbers, and the larger papers had to make deeper cuts than smaller papers. At the same time, fewer large newspapers added staff than their smaller contemporaries. Investigators for the Pew Research Center insist that the newspapers of today find themselves caught between two vigorous, opposing forces. They said that Web competitiveness has opened the door for more innovative forms of journalism, but financial pressures hinder some newspapers from walking through it (Pew Research Center, 2008).

Some research has shown that the economic problem may not be as severe as is believed. For example, Baltes (2003) explored the economic viability of daily Internet newspapers in Ohio and determined that online newspapers are not bearing unnecessarily large risks in providing content for free. Instead, the study shows that most Ohio online newspapers have done a remarkable job of positioning themselves to remain profitable in future years. It remains to be seen whether that holds true years later.

Perhaps the market in which a newspaper is published has something to do with its profitability. Chyi (1999) wanted to see if market boundaries exist for online newspapers, whose audience has the potential to be global. Results determined that online newspapers still have confined markets, and geography makes a difference on the Web.

The researcher goes so far as to suggest online newspapers consider the economic implications involved with different geographic markets when developing their market strategies.

Reporter Role

A wealth of research has addressed the working environment of newsrooms, the role that the journalist has played on the Internet newspaper staff, the challenges that the journalist has faced and his view of this medium. The role of the reporter is the focus of Cassidy's (2003) gatekeeping research in which he discovered that more online newspaper journalists than print newspaper journalists rate getting information to the public more important than other tasks. Park (2002) approached the reporter position in terms of how they and their audiences view their role, newsworthiness, and public dialogue. Likewise, Morris (2000) observed how journalists define their jobs and analyzed their product and audience in case studies of three newspaper Web production sites. His research revealed that online newspaper journalists have more similarities than differences with print newspaper journalists. Perhaps the greatest hurdle facing the print journalist has been how to produce Web news stories that technologically compete with other forms of media. McCombs (2003) has analyzed the obstacles newsroom journalists face in producing multimedia stories online. Some of the journalists in the study believed they were pioneers in this different form of journalism that, at the time, was still taking shape. In his analysis of leadership styles at newspapers, Baker (2006) insists that the leadership style of the editors is paramount to the success of the online edition. Additionally, Singer (1996) insists that management has a major effect on newsroom attitudes and thus employee morale, especially in a new media environment.

When journalists first started producing online editions, few had much knowledge of interactive media (Singer, 1996). Ladner's (2001) analysis of the working experience of Canadian online journalists through labor process theory exposed that they considered themselves "non-experts" in an industry that is shifting from specialists to generalists. The professionals in this study report to no longer identify with the traditional journalist archetype as circulated in society. According to them, the traditional journalist has more time to specialize in an area without sacrificing quality of writing. In the earlier years of Internet newspapers, journalists were not as concerned about the method of delivery as they were with the content they were producing. Many journalists disengaged themselves from the process of exploring new ways to distribute the news and relied on their employers' direction. It could be that many feared the new technology would alienate them from their audiences and isolate some readers from information they needed to serve as responsible citizens (Singer, 1996). At the time of the study, journalists valued their gatekeeping role and saw their role as being "interpreters" of news (Singer, 1996, p. 400).

Singer, Tharp, and Haruta (1999) explored how U.S. newspapers are staffing their Web products and how those products compare with their print counterparts and discovered that online editors and their staffs are viewed as second-class citizens. Findings revealed that the larger the newspaper, the more likely it is to staff its two products independently. Copy editors were among the staffers most likely to split print and online duties. People with visual communication skills also do double duty, but salaries of designers who worked solely for the online product tended to be lower than those of their print-only counterparts at small papers – and higher at large ones. Online

staff size also increased with circulation size. Smaller papers had smaller staffs, but none of the small papers had online-only reporters. Papers with separate online staffs – which included all the largest ones – also were more apt to produce unique online content.

Singer, Tharp, and Haruta (1999) have offered another area of study. Their research supports the idea that new college graduates may have an advantage in landing a job if they are able and willing to work on the online product. The scholars suggest that multimedia skills and an understanding of the capabilities of computer technology are indeed valuable in online newsrooms and may be given greater weight than newspaper experience. Online editors are more open to hiring technologically-experienced people with no newspaper backgrounds. “Today’s graduates who do land online jobs with newspapers can expect to work hard and, perhaps, feel alienated from their counterparts in print” (Singer, Tharp, & Haruta, 1999, p. 44). In most cases, “staff sizes are too small to adequately support a quality online product, even without the compounding difficulties of fast-paced technological change” (Singer, Tharp, & Haruta, 1999, p. 45).

Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1976) pioneered research concerning journalists’ beliefs about their roles in newsgathering. In their study, some journalists saw themselves as neutral links distributing information to the public. They held firm to the traditional concepts of objectivity by reporting accurate, factual, and verifiable information. Others saw themselves as participants who provided analysis and interpretation of problems. Weaver and Wilholt (1986) expanded that research a decade later, posing many of the same questions as Johnston et al. Then, they were able to classify three categories of professional role conceptions for journalists: interpretive, disseminator, and adversarial. Ten years after, Weaver and Wilholt (1996) conducted a

similar study in which they were able to identify four categories of role perceptions: interpretive/investigative, disseminator, adversarial, and populist/mobilizer. The interpretive/investigative role investigates, analyzes and interprets issues. The disseminator gets information to the public. The adversarial acts as a skeptic of societal interests. The populist mobilizer role entertains, sets the political agenda, develops cultural interests, and serves as an avenue whereby people can express themselves.

When the Internet came along, some journalists saw their role as gatekeepers or credible interpreters evolving (Singer, 1996). Brill (2001) examined the way 66 journalists working for 12 online newspaper sites were viewed professionally and compared her data to those of journalists in Weaver and Wilholt's 1996 study. A recent study comparing the self-concepts of print and online newspaper journalists found that both groups perceived the interpretive/investigative and disseminator role conceptions as more important than the adversarial and populist/mobilizer role conceptions. This leads the research to today's newsroom. While there have been some studies dealing with the reporters' interaction with online editions and even fewer that explore the topic from management's perspective, this study will address how editors are spearheading the changes that have to take place on news staffs when they adopt an online edition.

Technology is here to stay, and weekly newspaper editors are in a most difficult position of balancing integrating the technology with managing a staff that could be contrary or indifferent to change. The focus, therefore, of this study is on the challenges weekly newspaper editors face with this innovation, how they have progressed since embracing or considering Web editions, and where they see weekly newspapers (and newspapers in general) headed in the future.

Summary

This literature review provided a framework for thinking about the state of Internet newspapers and the areas it influences in newspaper operation. The research showed that Internet editions are impacting the way newspapers produce content, view their operations, prepare their staffs, and generate revenue, among other areas. The literature revealed that reporters' roles are evolving as more journalists move to online platforms, Internet editions are starting to contain niche content, and that the interactive features on these sites are becoming more sophisticated. However, this researcher chose to focus on four areas from the literature – operations, staffs, content, and financial aspects – because these are areas that are common for all newspapers to deal with when it comes to producing a newspaper. What is even more noticeable is that these are issues that are affecting all newspapers including larger, daily newspapers as well as weeklies. The next chapter will present a breakdown of the research methodology used to examine the experiences of Mississippi weekly editors with Internet editions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research rationale and design for this study. An overview of the research approach is followed by a description of the techniques that were used to collect and analyze the data.

Methods

To develop an understanding of the problem, this researcher selected mixed methodology, which combined both quantitative and qualitative research in the same study. Cresswell (2009) defines mixed methods research as research that “involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study” (p. 4). This methodology is used when it is believed that there is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research than either form by itself (Cresswell, 2009). Mixed methods research is appropriate when qualitative or quantitative alone cannot address the complexity of an issue. It combines both processes so that a study is stronger than it would be by using one approach alone (Cresswell, 2009).

Quantitative research in this study involved a survey that presents an exhaustive view of the usage of Internet newspapers among Mississippi weekly editors and publishers. The quantitative stage of the study implements a questionnaire administered to the target population. Data from that instrument was used to compare frequencies and distinguish differences among editors. Priority in this study is given to the qualitative data as the researcher believes it explains more of the reasoning behind editor-publisher involvement with Internet newspapers. As the second and third stages of the research,

interviews and a case study offer data based on individuals' experiences. The interview stage consisted of follow-up semi-structured, in-depth interviews with study participants. This approach focused on people's actual experiences more than general beliefs and opinions (King & Horrocks, 2010). The researcher examined the data with the intent of identifying patterns or themes. The final stage, the case study, involved an observation and conversations with editorial staff members of one weekly newspaper that was seeing tremendous economic and community interest from their Internet newspaper. The case study method is suited in this instance because it enabled the researcher to understand actual incidents in depth within their real context (Yin, 2009).

This mixed methods research study had a sequential explanatory design, which means data was collected and analyzed consecutively in two separate phases. The process consists of collecting data from one methodology and then following up with the collection of data from another methodology that builds on the results of the initial data. "The two forms of research are separate but connected" (Creswell, 2009, p. 211). In keeping with these criteria, this study began with the development and implementation of a questionnaire (quantitative phase) and, subsequent to data analysis, had a second phase consisting of follow-up semi-structured interviews with participants willing to continue with the study and a third phase involving a case study of one of the participants in the study (qualitative phases, respectively). This study emphasized mostly a qualitative endeavor of interviews with a sample of the 75 weekly newspaper editors in Mississippi. There are 82 counties in the state. Eighty-one of those counties, obtained from a list with the Mississippi Press Association, have their own newspaper. In addition, the Mississippi

Press Association agreed to support this study, which the researcher expected would lead to an increase in editor involvement.

As a required first step in the research process, the researcher submitted a proposal to The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board for permission to proceed with the study (Appendix D). Upon board approval, a 39-question survey (Appendix A), including multiple-choice and short-answer questions, was distributed online via Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) through the Mississippi Press Association directory to the 75 weekly newspaper editors and publishers. Those editors and publishers who were willing to participate responded to the survey. The researcher deemed it necessary to conduct the surveys first because from them, it could be determined which editors were willing to participate in the interviews. Survey questions were linked to the research questions.

RQ1: How have Mississippi weekly newspapers changed their operation processes to publish Internet editions? (addressed in survey questions 1-8)

RQ2: How have Mississippi weekly newspaper staffs evolved to publish online editions? (addressed in survey questions 9-15)

RQ3: How is content changing from print editions to Internet versions in Mississippi weekly Internet newspapers? (addressed in survey questions 16-26)

RQ4: How much is it costing Mississippi weekly newspapers to publish an Internet edition and how much are they making from them? (addressed in survey questions 27-33)

RQ5: What barriers do Mississippi weekly newspaper editors believe there are to publishing Internet editions in non-metro communities? (addressed in survey question 34)

RQ6: What do Mississippi weekly editors foresee as the future of Internet newspapers in the state? (addressed in survey questions 35-38)

The survey asked editors and publishers if they would be willing to take part in an in-depth interview further exploring the subject. Based on their responses, the researcher interviewed all willing participants and called a few more editors by telephone to garner one-fourth, or about 25 interviews that make up the bulk of the study data. The survey data offers a comprehensive view of the overall state of weekly newspaper Internet journalism in Mississippi.

Step One

To begin the survey process, the researcher followed the advice of Mississippi Press Association officials who recommended writing a cover or introductory letter to the editors, sending the letter and survey to them and allowing them to forward both to their weeklies' mailing list along with a word from the executive director about their support of the effort. The survey questionnaire was posted online using Survey Monkey and opened to willing participants for completion for three weeks. It was estimated that surveys would take no more than 15 minutes to complete online. The questionnaire contained standardized, close-ended questions relating to newspaper operation, content, profitability, etc. in terms of their Internet edition. Due to a less than 25% response rate after that attempt, the researcher followed up by sending an email with a link to the survey to every weekly newspaper that had not already participated from the Mississippi Press Association website. The response rate increased to a little over 31%, or 23 participants. Survey responses were coded based on research questions. The researcher measured operations by the daily practices newspapers editors were undergoing to

produce the Internet editions, staff by the editorial employees working at these newspapers and their experiences, content by the type and length of stories included in the editions, and finances by the amount of money newspapers were spending to product the editions and the amount of money they were making from them. Interview data were analyzed and themes were identified.

Step Two

Then the researcher proceeded to the second stage of the research process. The second stage consisted of follow-up telephone interviews to provide more insight into the problem. The researcher developed questions that expounded on themes recognized from the first stage of analysis. These measures were consistent with the mixed methods approach (Cresswell, 2009). For this second stage, the researcher telephoned the editor or publisher of as many Mississippi weekly newspapers as would agree to request participation. The researcher explained the importance of the study and how its results would provide insights into how weekly newspaper editors across the state approach the Internet newspaper dilemma. Once the researcher garnered the approval of the news editor or publisher, the researcher set up a time with each editor or publisher to conduct a 20-30 minute call back interview. The researcher conducted 25 interviews – 20 with editors whose newspapers have online publications and five editors whose newspapers do not.

Interviews were chosen as the primary qualitative research method because they expose the reasons why some of the newspapers are where they are in terms of operation, profitability, content selection, etc., and provide a plethora of insight into the reasons why weekly newspaper editors make the decisions they do. Potter (1996) describes

interviewing as “the technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally” (p. 96). To Berger (2000), interviews allow researchers to “get inside the minds of people and to gain access to material of considerable importance” (p. 125). The researcher can easily record and evaluate detailed responses to questions in a structured interview. There are other advantages of doing semi-structured interviews. They provide a chance for the researcher to “develop a rapport with the respondents and may be able to elicit replies to sensitive questions that would remain unanswered in a mail or telephone survey” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 190). On the other hand, some disadvantages of telephone interviews are that respondents could refuse to answer some questions or may hang up the telephone.

Only editors or those individuals in charge of the ultimate decision making of weekly Mississippi newspaper staff Internet sites were interviewed. These people typically have the title of editor, publisher, or owner. Only a couple of newspapers had individuals with different titles. Though it was initially understood that attempting to interview all 75 editors was an ambitious endeavor, the scholar anticipated one-fourth, or about 25 editors, would participate. That goal was reached and satisfied research requirements because interviews allow the researcher to use a smaller sample and provide more precise responses to delicate issues (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). One-fourth of the editors are an adequate number to explain the complexities that weekly editors face when dealing with the Internet.

Initially, the researcher planned to select those editors and publishers who consented to the interviews through the online survey. Since only 13 editors consented to the interviews through the online survey, the researcher called editors listed in the 2008-

2009 Mississippi Press Association Media Directory and included editors based on their willingness to participate. All interviews were audiotaped with participant consent and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Editors were asked the same set of 40 standardized questions in a predetermined order, and interviews took between 20 to 40 minutes to complete. The interviews consisted of a variety of open-ended questions that disclosed editors' thoughts as they considered and implemented Internet editions.

The scholar is aware that there are some problems with interviewing. Potential hindrances are time, cost, access to respondents, and interviewer bias (Babbie, 2004; Berger, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Interviews can also be slow and time consuming since there is a great deal of questioning, recording of answers, and transcribing of data involved. Telephone interviews could also get expensive, and interviewers may not have the access to respondents that they prefer. There could be other problems such as interviewer bias and generalizability. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) state, "The physical appearance, age, race, gender, dress, nonverbal behavior, and comments of the interviewer may prompt respondents to answer questions untruthfully" (p. 190). Additionally, small samples involved with intensive interviews could limit generalization to the target population (Babbie, 2004; Berger, 2000; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

Step Three

The final step in methodology included a case study of one of the weekly newspapers, *The Wayne County News*, which is doing an exceptional job of producing both a print and online edition. The selection was determined by Mississippi Press Association recommendations, interview analysis, and editor-publisher approval.

Mississippi Press Association officials suggested several newspapers from which the researcher could select as a case study model. The researcher, in the interviews with weekly editors, narrowed those choices to the two newspapers that appeared to be having the most promising experience with the print and online editions. The researcher chose the case study newspaper based on the editor and publisher's invitation to visit. The case study required the researcher to spend part of the day at the newspaper observing their operation. Combined, all methods present a backdrop of Internet newspaper journalism at weekly newspapers in Mississippi, a look into the complexities involved with publishing Internet newspapers, and a narrative of one newspaper whose operation could serve as a model for not only Mississippi weeklies but newspapers in general.

Summary

The final stage of data analysis for the study was to summarize the meaning of the research. During this component, the researcher drew connections from the data of the first stage, the shared experiences of the interviewees from the second stage, and the case study in the third stage of research to determine connections among the data. The mixing of the data to find answers to research questions was critical to the rationale for a mixed-methods study. The next three chapters present an analysis of that data in the same order the research was conducted – survey, interviews, and case study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Mixed methods research, with a quantitative and qualitative component, was used to examine the state of weekly Internet journalism in Mississippi. This methodology utilized an explanatory sequential plan that involved collecting data consecutively in three separate stages. Data resulting from the first stage were used to identify areas of editor-publisher experiences to explore in the second or interview stage. The second stage was expanded to a third stage consisting of a case study of a weekly newspaper's exemplary management of both print and Internet editions. This chapter presents the results of the first two research methodology. The case study analysis follows in the next chapter.

The chapter begins with results of a survey questionnaire that provided an overview of the uses of Internet newspapers among weekly editors and publishers across the state. This constituted the quantitative phase of the study. The interview results, which follow the survey results, sought to explain how newspaper editors at weekly Mississippi publications are dealing with Internet editions. This portion of the chapter builds on the survey results with the results of in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 25 weekly editors and publishers from across the state. As the qualitative component of the research, the interview results explain why some weekly newspapers are having success with their Internet editions and some are seeing no difference at all with theirs. It also reveals the thought processes of weekly editors as they produce Internet newspapers. Again, the overall research questions that guided each of the research processes are:

RQ1: How have Mississippi weekly newspapers changed their operation processes to publish Internet editions?

RQ2: How have Mississippi weekly newspaper staffs evolved to publish online editions?

RQ3: How is content changing from print editions to Internet versions in Mississippi weekly Internet newspapers?

RQ4: How much is it costing Mississippi weekly newspapers to publish an Internet edition and how much are they making from them?

RQ5: What barriers do Mississippi weekly newspaper editors believe there are to publishing Internet editions in non-metro communities?

RQ6: What do Mississippi weekly editors foresee as the future of Internet newspapers in the state?

Survey Analysis

The survey was administered online to weekly newspaper editors and publishers in Mississippi through Survey Monkey. The results were analyzed with Pew Research, Bivings Group, and RJI studies as a basis. The survey was distributed initially by email through the Mississippi Press Association (MPA) by way of its weekly newspaper database. The researcher sent a follow-up email with the link to the survey to those editors and publishers who had not responded to the MPA attempt. Twenty-seven of the total 75 non-daily newspaper editors and publishers in the state responded to the survey. However, only 23 completed it. Therefore, the response rate was approximately 31%.

It is important that this study first point out descriptions of the editors and publishers who participated in the survey. Of the newspapers surveyed, 80% have a print

and online edition (with 20 editors reporting to have both, and five with only a print edition). However, eight reported zero years being online. Forty-four percent (or 11 editors' newspapers) have been online for a year or less. That number is nearly half the survey respondents. The average number of years all of the editors have been publishing online is four years. The average number of years the respondents have had a print edition is 97 years.

In terms of newspaper characteristics, 15 of the newspapers (or 60%) are locally owned, and 10 (or 40%) are corporately owned. The average circulation size is between 2,500 and 5,000 readers of their print edition, with 40% of the respondents' newspapers falling into this category. Four percent have less than 1,000 print readers, 20% have from 1,001 to 2,500, 28% have between 5,001 and 7,000, and 8% is split evenly between those newspapers with 7,501 to 10,000 readers and those with more than 10,000. Nearly all of the newspapers (88%) have a paper edition that is published once a week, typically towards the end of the week on a Wednesday or Thursday. Only 12% publish their print versions twice a week.

In response to the first research question raised in this study regarding weeklies changing their operation for an Internet edition, the survey revealed that weekly editors and publishers have not changed their operation process much to produce an online edition. The greatest operational difference is the frequency with which editors report the news. The majority of newspapers (50%) update their online edition once per week and more often only if needed (for late-breaking news, etc.). Thirty-one percent of the newspapers are updated daily (seven times a week). This is a significant distinction from the one-day-a-week print publication model that all of them have followed for years. This

could suggest that weeklies are not having as much success with the Internet editions because the staff members have not published them enough to see how the staff members could improve the production process.

In regards to the second research question concerning the evolution of weekly staffs to accommodate an Internet edition, results showed weekly staffs have not evolved in terms of staff makeup. Nor have the staffs expanded their staffs to do the extra work an Internet edition brings. The full-time editorial staff of all of the newspapers is between one and five people, the bulk of which also work on the Internet edition. One editor responded that his newspaper has one reporter who updates the Internet using stories produced by the entire staff; another responded that the online edition is handled off-site by a staff of two. Still, 100% reported that the same people on the print editorial staff do all of the work on the online edition. This shows that publishers saw little need to expand their staffs for the new medium.

The average age of the editor was 46, with the youngest being 27 and the oldest 73. The majority of editors/publishers hold a bachelor's degree, mostly in the area of communication and journalism. The average number of years these editors have been in the newspaper business is 16 years. However, one editor has served as little as two and a half years and another has served as many as 52 years. The median number of years for editors and publishers leading their current newspapers is eight. These numbers reveal that the bulk of the editors were in their positions long before the Internet arose, so they already had established ways of producing the news and were perhaps more reluctant to change.

The makeup of the staff mirrors the leadership. The majority of staffers at these newspapers were between 35 and 44 years old (47%), only a few years younger than the average editor. Five percent were 18 to 24, and 5% are over age 55. Like their supervisor counterparts, most (70%) hold bachelor's degrees, which was the highest level of education amongst all the editors and publishers. Twenty-five percent are community college graduates, and 5% hold high school diplomas. These findings contradict Pew Research reports that more seasoned, veteran journalists are being replaced with technologically capable journalists with fresh ideas. While it is happening at some newspapers, this is certainly not the case for the greater part of weeklies.

This research question also leads one to question how these staff members get prepared for the Internet edition. Seventy percent of the newspaper editors in this study trained existing staff to handle the Internet edition. Few newspapers (5%) hired additional staff already skilled in these areas to work on the Internet edition. Twenty-five percent of the editors did both – trained existing staff and hired new people who were already skilled to handle the Internet edition. This suggests that weeklies are stretching their already overextended staffs and operations processes to have online editions that perhaps could be much better with fresher faces and different operational measures.

According to editors, the staff most needed the most training in uploading information to the Internet edition (63%). The ability to shoot video and basic reporting skills tied as the next most required skills (42%) followed by the ability to use a digital/video camera (37%) (see Figure 1). The area in which staffers needed the least training was writing for the Internet or adjusting their current writing style to fit an Internet environment (11%) (see Figure 2). Four editors and publishers maintain that they

contribute no technological skills to the staff that help produce the Internet edition.

Others declared that they are skilled in other areas – layout and design, problem solving, plug and play site upload, HTML coding, photo editing, etc. – that help create the Internet edition. Still, some editors have learned how to use the Web by teaching themselves. This lack of training could explain why so many weekly editors and their staffs have been hesitant to embrace Internet editions.

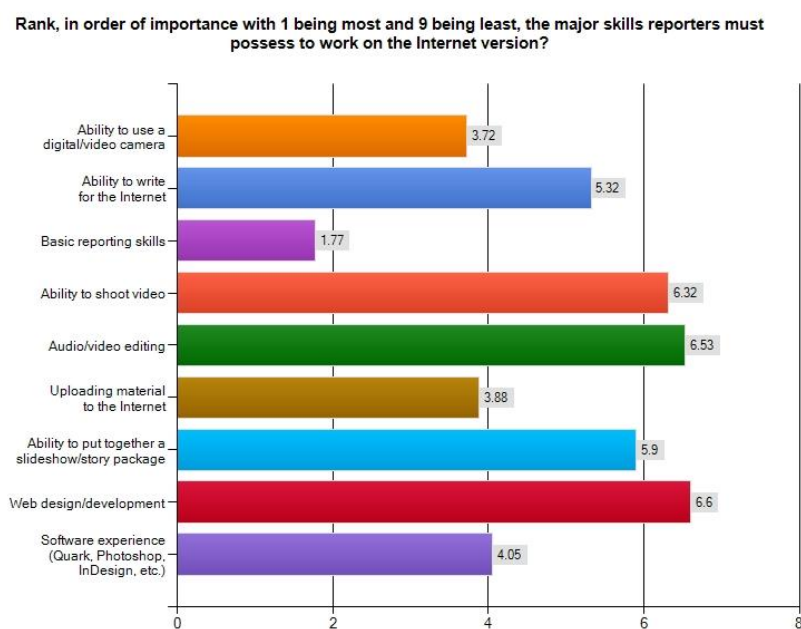


Figure 1. Ranking of most to least important skills Mississippi weekly editors believe reporters must have to work on Internet editions

These previous findings support RJI results that editors and reporters are getting training for Web publishing from their organizations. However, editors and reporters in the RJI study are getting training in different areas from journalists at weeklies. RJI study participants are getting training in writing, graphics, layout, or design for Web publishing, while editors in this study believe the most important training areas are uploading, ability to use a video camera, and basic reporting skills. This shows that while

it is apparent that weekly editors also see the need to train their staffs for this new format, their training is on more basic levels than respondents of the RJI study.

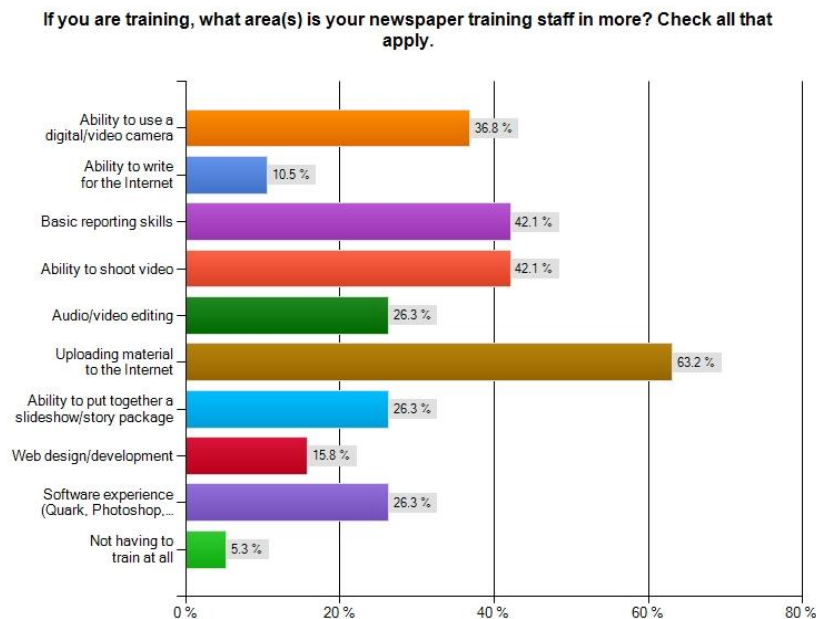


Figure 2. Ranking of areas Mississippi weekly newspapers are training staffs for online editions

The third research question addressed the differences in content between weekly printed and online newspapers. Results show that there is little difference in the type of news content that editors and publishers believe should go in print and Web editions. In fact, most Internet content is an exact replica of what appears in the print edition. While the Internet edition may offer an avenue to publish specialized news stories or specific kinds of packages, 67% of editors put all of their content on both versions. Fifty-five percent of editors said their news stories on the Internet are typically the same size as print stories, and 40% said their Internet stories are shorter than their print stories. Additionally, 83% of editors said their news stories on the Internet are written in the same style as typical news stories (inverted pyramid style); 11% said their stories are written in

a way to appeal to a “virtual” audience (fewer details, etc.). These results support and conflict the Bivings Group and RJI findings in several ways. First, the results support Bivings Group findings that there are more newspapers supplying PDF (or exact duplicate) versions of their editions. It contradicts Bivings Group results that revealed an increase in diverse content arising on the majority of newspaper Internet pages. Bivings Group reports showed an increase in social bookmarking tools, article commenting, and integration of user-generated content, and most weeklies are not offering much varied content. Likewise, the findings also contradict RJI results that showed journalists’ organizations operate their Web and print editions as integrated products suited to different formats rather than separate publications. The majority of weekly newspaper editors operates their print and Web products as two separate products, but they publish the same content on both. However, most editors give greater importance to the print edition.

Weekly editors ranked the types of news that was most important to include in their print and Web editions, and results show their rankings for the types in both venues were extremely similar. They ranked local news as the most important kind for the print publication at 70% and online publication at 71%, and national and international news as the least important for both venues, with 95% for print and 79% for online (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). While the content remained similar, editors note that cross promotion has helped to boost attraction in the Web edition and maintain interest in the print edition. Two editors admitted that they make their online stories shorter than the print versions but include a note to refer the reader to the full print version of the story.

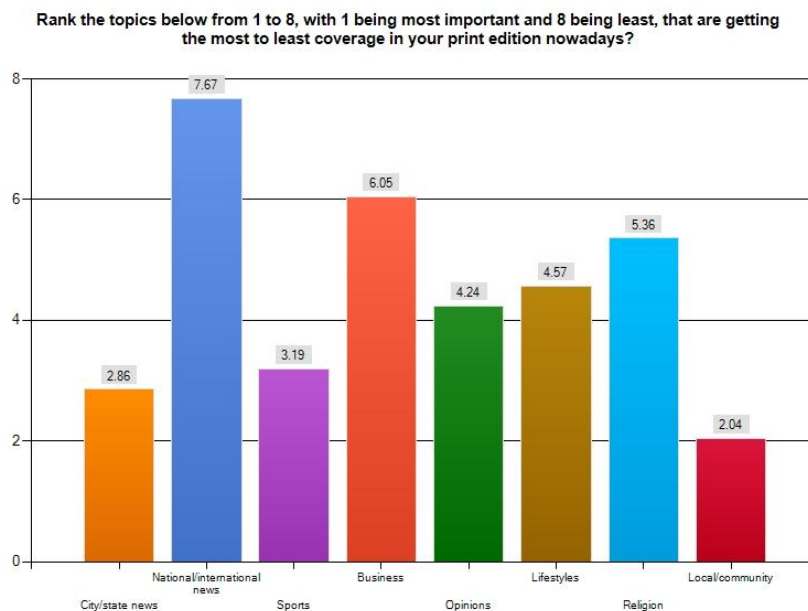


Figure 3. Ranking of newspaper topics getting the most to the least coverage in Mississippi weekly print editions

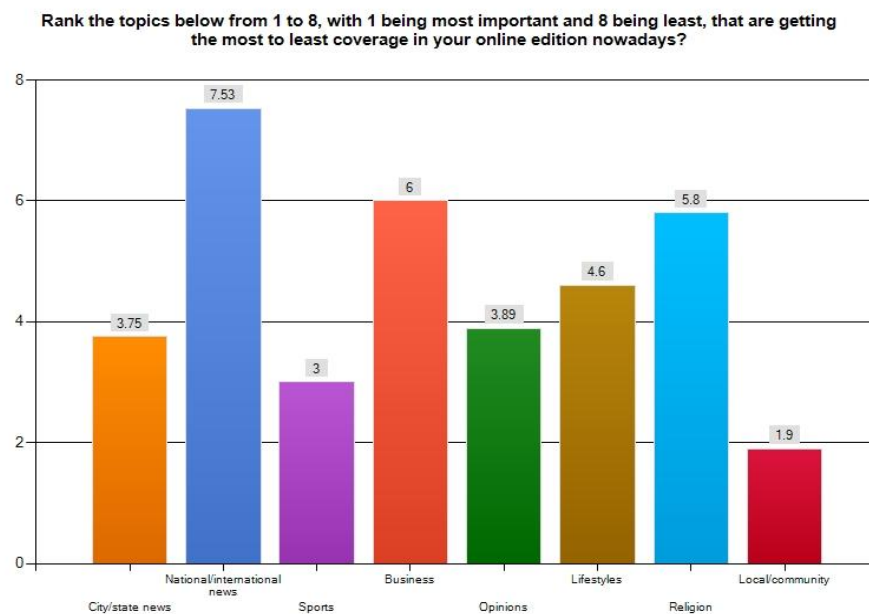


Figure 4. Ranking of newspaper topics getting the most to the least coverage in Mississippi weekly online editions

News content was not the only content change editors had to consider. They also had to contemplate whether to make changes to graphics, illustrations, and advertising for

the Internet versions. Overall, 40% of these editors include about the same amount of graphics and illustrations in their Internet editions as they do for their print versions. Thirty-five percent use fewer graphics and illustrations online than in their print newspapers; 20% use more graphics and illustrations online than in print. Moreover, 74% of editors state that there is no difference in the way graphics and illustrations for the Internet version are designed. They look the same and are constructed in the same manner. Twenty-one percent of the editors and publishers design their graphics and illustrations differently (for instance, they include more color and more graphics) for the Internet edition than for the print.

Similarly, there were some differences in terms of how editors believed advertising should be modified for the Internet edition. Sixty-eight percent of editors said that their advertising for the Internet edition is designed differently than for print. Editors commented that the Internet advertising is “more modular and concise,” “designed to fit the website spaces,” and some “have motion features.” Others said that they only sell buttons and banner ads online and don’t show display ads, which are the strength of the print editions and the determinant (in most cases) to how much news content goes into the print versions. Twenty-six percent said their advertising content is designed the same as for the print edition. These results show that there is less variation in news content but more in the areas of graphics, illustrations, and advertising.

The fourth research question probed the costs to newspapers to produce the online editions and whether they are making money from them. This was an area not addressed in the Pew, Bivings, or RJI reports but one the researcher thought relevant to bring out in this study as important to the operation of an Internet edition. Results show that most

editors are relying on the same traditional streams of revenue that have supported their print editions to support their online editions as well. The customary way newspapers have been supported is through advertising and subscription dollars. Ninety-five percent of the editors said their print edition is equally supported by advertising, subscriptions, and classifieds. An overwhelming 89% of newspaper editors said their online edition is supported by advertising. They said that subscriptions, classifieds, and other forms of advertising support their sites only minimally. Some admitted to experiencing difficulty making ends meet for both editions. For example, 9% of editors confessed to having trouble financing their print editions, and 11% acknowledged they were having difficulty supporting their Internet editions. To encourage advertising, 67% of newspaper editors offered advertisers package deals for advertising in both editions; 24% did not. One editor noted that newspapers' ability to support either edition is reliant upon the economy by commenting that "in a down economy, businesses often cut their advertising."

Some editors (52%) said that they will resort to offering numerous incentives to draw and keep advertisers for the print edition. They proposed enticements like combination rates for multiple papers, volume discounts, extended run pricing, discounts, special promotions, and frequency buys, lineage discounts, and free color. One editor commented, "We try to push print and use online as a bonus." Another wrote, "We offer specials for multiple special section buys, but most of our clients aren't interested in online advertising. They prefer print." Results show that the effort to push online advertising is not that extensive. Sixty-one percent admitted that they do not offer advertisers incentives to be included in the online edition, and only 39% do. This indicates that the majority of them do not wish to deviate from what they have relied on

for income for years. Some of the incentives they offer for online advertising are low rates, frequency, buy one and get one free, display ads with links to their own websites, and website video commercials. Editors were split (42% each) between believing their advertisers dislike advertising in the Internet edition and not knowing how their advertisers feel about advertising on the Internet.

Another area editors and publishers had to address to make money from their online editions is how they would sustain their subscribers with all the free content that some other Internet newspapers provide. The free content has forced many to rethink how they produce news for the online audience or even if they would produce it. However, many editors in this study followed suit with what the majority were already doing. Fifty-three percent of the newspapers do not charge readers for Internet content. Forty-two percent charge a yearly subscription for content, while 5% charge a monthly fee. Eleven percent said readers pay a one-time access fee for content, and another 11% charge a minimal additional fee with the print subscription. This reluctance could be hurting some newspapers tremendously, especially if editors take into consideration the amount of hits they get per month and how they could turn the mass of those hits into paid subscribers. Half the newspapers online (50%) get more than 5,000 hits per month to their Internet editions; the average number of monthly hits for all the newspapers is between 3,001 and 5,000. Overall, findings reveal that Internet revenue is nowhere near what newspapers get in print. That conclusion could be tied directly to editors' reluctance to force readers to pay for Internet content.

The fifth research question explored the barriers that are keeping some weekly newspapers offline. While deciding how to charge for content is an area some

newspapers are still working out, editors said charging is not the biggest hindrance to some newspapers going online. Eighty-three percent reported that readers' lack of computer skills is a tremendous area of consideration for editors and publishers and an obstacle that is keeping some newspapers offline. This finding could explain why some editors are so reluctant to jump into Internet editions. If they believe their readers will not access the Internet, there is no need to invest in the Internet edition. There was also a significant correlation between the computer skills of the staff and the computer skills of the newspaper's readers (see Table 1). This correlation suggests that newspaper editors who were concerned that their readers did not have computer skills also had concerns about the computer skills of their staff members.

Table 1

Correlation between Staff Computer Skills and Reader Computer Skills

	Computer skills of staff as obstacles	Computer skills readers as obstacles
Computer skills of staff as obstacles	1	0.535**
Computer skills readers as obstacles	0.535**	1

Note. **p < .01

What should concern editors more are findings indicating that 33% of editors agree that the newspaper staff's own lack of computer skills is another obstacle to being online. There was a significant correlation between the number of years the newspaper had been available online and the computer skills of the staff (see Table 2). This implies that the computer skills of the staff are hindering newspapers from becoming available

online. For 25% of the editors, lack of development funds to start an online edition is an additional hurdle, and 17% said it is lack of reader interest. Four editors noted that the problem is lack of quality high-speed Internet access to the rural areas where most of these newspapers are located. Two cited lack of advertising support as obstacles. Another editor said the challenge is “making people aware it’s there.” Barriers to going online were not addressed in the Pew, Bivings, or RJI reports but were another area the researcher deemed vital to explaining why some weeklies are online and some are not.

Table 2

Correlation between Number of Years Online and Staff Computer Skills

	Years online	Computer skills of staff as obstacles
Years online	1	0.485*
Computer skills of staff as obstacles	0.485*	1

Note. * $p < .05$

The last research question dealt with the future of Internet editions at weekly newspapers in Mississippi. Results showed that editors did not express strong confidence that the Internet edition was important to the future of newspaper publishing. In fact, only 32% of editors agree that online newspapers are vital to the future of non-daily newspaper publishing. Eighteen percent strongly agree about the Internet’s significance to their future, and 14% strongly disagree that it will be important in the future of their publishing. Twenty-seven percent had no opinion about the matter. A significant correlation was found between the editors’ opinions about the importance of online

editions and the editors' concerns about readers' computer skills (see Table 3). This correlation might indicate that editors do not believe online editions are important for newspapers because their readers lack the necessary computer skills to be interested in online editions.

Table 3

Correlation between Editors' Opinions of Importance of Online Editions and Editors' Concerns about Readers' Computer Skills

	Computer skills of readers skills as obstacles	Editors' opinions of online importance
Computer skills of readers as obstacles	1	-.449*
Editors' opinions of online importance	-.449*	1

Note. * $p < .05$

Additionally, there was also a significant correlation between the average years the newspaper has been online to whether editors believed the online edition is vital (see Table 4). This finding is interesting because the correlation implies that editors whose newspapers are online seem to find it important... maybe that is why they went online in the first place or maybe now that they are online, they see how important it is.

Table 4

Correlation between Average Years Online and Editors' Beliefs About Online Edition Being Vital

	Average years online	Editors' opinions of online importance
Average years online	1	0.522*
Editors' opinions of online importance	0.522*	1

Note. * $p < .05$

Editors' thoughts about the relevance of Internet newspapers could be the basis of their reasoning behind the future of Internet journalism. Sixty-eight percent of editors believe that online newspaper publication will never be the sole format for newspaper publication. When it comes to their own newspapers, 83% said they will never publish their newspapers as an online edition only. Thirteen percent can see online-only journalism happening more than 15 years from now, and 4% believe it is possible between 11 and 15 years from now. For newspapers in general, 5% of editors said online-only publications could happen between six to 10 years from now; 23% believe it is a possibility more than 15 years from now. In all, 45% of editors said more than 75% of their readers would have to report using the Internet as their primary source of news before they would consider abandoning the print edition and publishing solely online. Fifteen percent would consider it if between 51-75% of their readers report it as their primary local news source. Forty-six percent said they would never consider publishing solely online. This finding shows that a great number of weekly editors are set on

maintaining the print edition as a primary news source in their communities. The last correlation test showed there was a significant correlation between whether newspaper editors believe they will be solely online and their opinion of being solely online (see Table 5). This result is not surprising because the editors' opinions about going solely online would clearly have some kind of impact on their beliefs about whether they will eventually be solely online.

Table 5

Correlation between Whether Newspapers Will Ever Be Solely Online and Editors' Opinions of Being Solely Online

	Ever be solely online	Editors' opinions of solely online
Ever be solely online	1	0.496*
Editors' opinions of solely online	0.496*	1

Note. * $p < .05$

Despite the previous finding, some editors are skeptical about the ability of the Internet newspaper to completely take over their operations. One editor, who referred to the lack of Internet access in some rural areas, stated that technology, as far as the Internet, is slow when one leaves the city limits in his county. "I don't think this will ever be a primary source of local news." A different editor questioned how he would handle items like inserts at his newspaper if there were no print edition. One more editor wrote, "No matter how good a website is, there is a large portion of our community which would not find it useful." These predictions support an additional finding in the Pew

report that showed that editors at larger papers predict greater danger for the future as opposed to those at smaller newspapers. It is apparent from the previous results and anonymous editor comments that weekly editors or those at smaller newspapers are not as fearful of their future or the takeover of Internet editions as larger, daily newspapers.

Interview Analysis

The major findings in this portion of the study are consistent with what the previous survey results revealed even though the same journalists were not questioned. The results are centered on operations, staff, news content, and costs/finances and grouped by research question. All the journalists in this study granted permission to use their names (see Table 6). Twenty of those editors have an online edition; five do not. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for commonalities and themes, and the data is organized by patterns according to this study's research questions and by Pew Research, Bivings Group, and RJI study models.

All the weekly newspapers in this study except *The Panolian*, the *Sea Coast Echo*, and the *Columbian Progress* are published once a week. *The Panolian* and *Sea Coast Echo* are published twice a week, and the *Columbian Progress* is published bi-weekly. The *East Central Van Cleave Link*, the *ReView of Jones County*, the *Neshoba Democrat*, *The Panolian*, and the *Sea Coast Echo* had the largest editorial staff at five each. All others had four or fewer on their editorial staffs. Two newspapers (the *Winston County Journal* and *The Belzoni Banner*) had one person, the publisher, on its editorial staff handling the Web edition.

Table 6

Breakdown of Weekly Editor Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Newspaper	City/Town	Circulation	Local/corp. owned	Online	Years online
C. Chesser	F	34	<i>The East Vancleave Link</i>	Hurley	2,000	Local	Y	2 ½
W. Prather	M	56	<i>The Carthaginian</i>	Carthage	5,700	Local	Y	7
M. Thornton	M	40	<i>The Review of Jones County</i>	Laurel	3,000	Local	Y	1
J. Prince	M	46	<i>The Neshoba Democrat</i>	Philadelphia	8,500	Local	Y	10
A. Hill	M	73	<i>Holmes County Herald</i>	Lexington	2,000	Local	Y	9
J. McNeece	M	40	<i>Calhoun County Journal</i>	Bruce	5,000	Local	Y	5
J. McCain	M	38	<i>Winston County Journal</i>	Louisville	3,200	Corp.	Y	8
R. Howell	M	58	<i>The Panolian</i>	Batesville	6,000	Local	Y	8
J. Ponder	M	57	<i>Sea Coast Echo</i>	Bay St. Louis	7,800	Local	Y	8
T. Beeland	M	49	<i>Scott County Times</i>	Forest	5,700	Local	Y	6
W. Nichols	M	45	<i>Columbian Progress</i>	Columbia	5,000	Corp.	Y	1
M. Turner	F	33	<i>Democrat</i>	Senatobia	5,200	Local	Y	9
N. Morris	F	55	<i>Magnolia Gazette</i>	Magnolia	2,000	Local	Y	1
H. Freret	F	42	<i>Stone County Enterprise</i>	Wiggins	3,800	Corp.	Y	6
L. Dees	F	32	<i>Star Herald</i>	Kosciusko	5,000	Corp.	Y	5
J. Toney	M	51	<i>The Belzoni Banner</i>	Belzoni	1,100	Local	Y	2
P. Keane	M	46	<i>The Wayne County News</i>	Waynesboro	4,500	Local	Y	5
B. Taylor	F	57	<i>Tunica Times</i>	Tunica	2,000	Local	Y	12
Z. Buckley	M	35	<i>The Impact</i>	Bay Springs	180,000*	Local	Y	3
M. Worrell	F	38	<i>Copiah County Courier</i>	Hazlehurst	6,000	Local	Y	2
G. Oliver	F	51	<i>Leland Progress</i>	Leland	850	Local	N	0
W. Bolen	M	49	<i>Clarke County Tribune</i>	Quitman	4,000	Corp.	N	0
H. Mosby	M	59	<i>Deer Creek Pilot</i>	Rolling Fork	1,500	Local	N	0
C. Picard	F	46	<i>Biloxi D'Iberville Press</i>	Biloxi- D'Iberville	5,000	Corp.	N	0
B. Little	F	60	<i>Spirit of Morton</i>	Morton	1,500	Local	N	0

Note: * The exception is *The Impact*, which is a weekly newspaper with a mixture of news and classified advertisements. Its circulation is so high because it is distributed free of charge by delivery to residents in Bay Springs and surrounding counties.

Question 1: How have Mississippi weekly newspapers changed their operation processes to publish Internet editions?

Findings show that Mississippi weekly editors do not see any significant difference in their journalism as a result of having an Internet edition. These results are not consistent with the first major part of the RJI study in which journalists noted that the continuous news desk of the Internet edition has made journalism better for them. In this researcher's study, editors indicated that their newspapers have not strayed much from the way they have always done things. All of the weeklies, due to the way they are producing their online editions, are making only minor changes to their overall operations to accommodate an Internet edition. For the most part, weekly editorial staffs have not been affected tremendously by the technological changes that an Internet edition would appear to create. The ease can be attributed to the simple cut-and-paste process that the majority of editors are taking to put their content on the Web. All editors outsource the maintenance of their sites to an independent Web hosting company that houses all the content on their off-site server.

The Internet edition begins as the editor adjusts and prepares versions of the print story for Web publication. The process for producing a new online edition can take anywhere from an hour and a half to 15 minutes at one sitting, according to editors. When they are ready to put items on the Web, they log into the hosting site from their locations. Then they pull in articles from their hard drives by copying them and posting or pasting them into a template on the hosting site page. With just a click, the new edition can be available to readers in a mere second or at a later specified time. In addition to that, nearly all the editors also upload a PDF version of their print edition to appear as an e-

edition (electronic edition) or direct replica of the print product on computer. Viewers to the sites can read the main news stories for free but have to have a subscription to access the entire edition on the PDF. Editors such as Melody Worrell of the *Copiah County Courier* say their newspapers opt for both formats to avoid picking and choosing what content they will offer readers online (M. Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Editors and publishers Mark Thornton of *The ReView of Jones County*, Waide Prather of *The Carthaginian*, and James Prince of the *Neshoba Democrat* say that their newspapers have followed their same process of producing an Internet edition since the day they started the versions. For Prince, it was a matter of mimicking what he had been doing at the other weekly newspapers he owns in Madison and Kemper counties. Prather, on the other hand, admits that his newspaper staff took particular caution when going online in the first place after looking at some of the mistakes he says other newspapers were making by posting stories online before they appeared in the print edition and giving them away for free (W. Prather, personal communication, May 6, 2010). The updating/production process is so simple that editors admit that even someone with no news ability can do it. Tim Beeland, publisher of the *Scott County Times*, said, “It doesn’t take much time for someone to upload the information once they know how to do it” (T. Beeland, personal communication, May 26, 2010).

The greatest operational difference has been in the way weeklies have had to change how they handle news. New technology has caused many editors to view news gathering as happening on a daily basis rather than two or three times a week as they were accustomed to before the Internet. To adjust to having the Internet edition, the

majority of the staffs have to change their deadlines to make sure they keep their sites current. Editors assert that the best thing about doing this is that it gives them another outlet to reach the public. Rupert Howell, managing editor and co-owner of *The Panolian* in Batesville, said that rather than having a couple of deadlines per week, weeklies with an Internet edition have deadlines nearly daily now. He affirmed that the online edition has changed the tempo of the newsroom. “You used to cover a meeting and not have to worry about not having the story until Thursday, but now we try to get it up the next day if possible. Sometimes we get up breaking news immediately” (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). Wright Nichols, production director of the *Columbian Progress*, uttered similar remarks. “Instead of thinking we’ve got to do this twice a week, we’ve got to stay on top of it and do it as soon as it comes up. If a story comes across, we need to get something on the Internet in five or 10 minutes rather than waiting in writing the story maybe two days later and having it published” (personal communication, May 28, 2010). Worrell agreed, saying that the Web edition is forcing editors to be more conscious of events going on “as they happen” so that they can take advantage of them. “If we don’t, somebody else will,” Worrell said. “Somebody can come in and do what we should be doing and take it away from us. We don’t want to lose the business because we’re lazy” (M. Worrell, personal communication, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

There are a few editors who have to put a little more effort in the updating process because they are treating their print edition and Web edition as two separate products. These editors follow the cut-and-paste process for the full edition once a week but additionally post any breaking news immediately onto the Web – even if it is only an

abbreviated story followed up by a longer online story or print story later. Most times this happens on a daily basis. The newspaper will usually end abbreviated stories with a cross promotion to their print edition telling readers to see the full story there or log back into the website later for the full story. All the editors interviewed post obituaries as soon as they are written, most on a daily basis.

Perhaps the way weeklies operate their Web editions can be tied to editors' reasons for starting the editions in the first place. The majority of the editors gave inadequate justification for why their newspapers started online editions, which could explain why many have not put much effort into producing them every week. Reasons for starting online editions ranged from "that's the way things were going" or "everyone was doing it at the time," "it was the wave," "to catch up with the times," "it was a necessary evil" or to "keep some competition from coming in" (T. Beeland, personal communication, May 26, 2010; Z. Buckley, personal communication, June 11, 2010; A. Hill, personal communication, May 17, 2010; P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010; N. Morris, personal communication, June 3, 2010; J. Toney, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Others had more practical motives for having the editions. Joel McNeece of the *Calhoun County Journal* saw it as a way to keep their brand visible to the community as a primary news provider for their county, and Joseph McCain, publisher of the *Winston County Journal*, envisioned it as means to regain the interest of people outside the county (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010; J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). Cherie Chesser, publisher of the *East Central-Vancleave Link*, started the online edition as a way to archive stories and save herself and her staff the time of pulling stories for residents. Thornton's and

Nichols' online papers were started to meet the demands of their readers, especially for the ability to see the obituaries more frequently, and particularly for younger readers (W. Nichols, personal communication, May 28, 2010; M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010). For Brooks Taylor of the *Tunica Times*, the online edition was a way to combat postal delays with the print product and get the newspaper to their subscribers faster (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

The last component of this first research question dealt with the way weekly editors view their print and online products. This is important because an editor's views will guide his or her decisions. The majority of weekly editors and publishers consider the Web edition a small supplement to the print product and not two separate, equal products. Yet, editors reported that they have no plans of giving up either soon. The only exception is Beeland, of the *Scott County Times*, who is trimming his online presence because he says his market does not warrant an Internet edition. Beeland said, "We're reducing the amount of coverage we carry on our website. We're going to be putting less on there and pushing the print edition more. I'm shutting it down more so than building it up, and that's because there's not a mass of people in this area who have access to the Internet" (T. Beeland, personal communication, May 26, 2010).

This segment of the results also contradict RJI findings in which journalists said that their organizations operate their Website and print newspaper as an integrated product tailored to different formats, rather than treat them uniquely. The current study data concluded that Mississippi weekly editors view the Internet edition as secondary to the print version, and thus do not give it as much attention. From the way editors think about the online edition to the way they produce them, editors have downplayed the

weekly Internet edition for its print counterpart. The aforementioned data showed that only a small number of editors started the Internet edition because they wanted to and consider it an asset to their newspaper.

Question 2: How have Mississippi weekly newspaper staffs evolved to publish an online edition?

Findings from editor interviews show that weeklies are not making the strides that dailies in the Pew and RJI studies are. Pew results revealed that newspapers are hiring journalists already trained in the skills to work on the Internet edition. In the case of the weeklies in this researcher's study, most weeklies are doing more with less, putting out their weekly editions – online and print – with a limited staff. The average number of editorial staff members at most weekly newspapers is two, including the publisher, who already handles numerous responsibilities. In most cases, only one or two people are handling the Internet editions. Because of their small sizes, the newspapers go through few changes in their operation to have the online editions. Editors said their newspapers were published as they always were before the Internet edition and did not require major adjustments. All of the staffs had to undergo some minor training to learn how to upload items to a Web manager who posts content online. Editors also struggled with changes in their mindsets and technology to be able to produce a Web newspaper. Once the initial learning investment took place, the staffs were set to launch their editions. After that, there was not much training journalists need to continue the sites, editors explained.

Participants in the RJI study reported that they have handled the challenges of the Internet editions well. This is not necessarily the case in this current study. The implementation of the Web edition has been largely the idea of editors. In most cases, the

owner of the newspaper was more excited about going online than the staff even though many admit that adopting the edition was a learning process for them as well as the staff. In Prince's case, he found that it was largely his persistence that caused the staff to have the edition. No one just stepped up and started doing it, he said (J. Prince, personal communication, May 11, 2010). Ponder says his attitude was "absolutely vital" in determining whether the staff would embrace or reject the edition. "If I decide to do it, we're going to do it. It's one of those deals where it made all the difference in the world," said Ponder (J. Ponder, personal communication, May 24, 2010).

Others said if management does not insist on the Web edition, no one else will. There are cases where the staff contradicted that belief as in the case of Turner whose staff was able to convince its publisher of their need for the Internet edition. According to Turner, the influence of leadership was vital in whether the staff had an Internet edition. Her staff members were able to convince their publisher of its need for it. Several years ago, the publisher was considering eliminating the online edition because he thought only one person on staff had been managing the site. When that person left the newspaper, he worried about having someone from the existing staff who could continue the site. After the staff members showed the publisher that they could do it and demonstrated the advantages of the site, he agreed to let them keep the website running. "He realized for a weekly paper, it was really important," Turner said. "So now he has a better attitude toward it than he did before" (M. Turner, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Some editors were so adamant about having the Internet edition that they did not consider – purposely or inadvertently – the staff in their adoption of it. One editor said his attitude toward having the Internet edition was no different than when any boss makes a

request of his employees. “When they [supervisors] say this is what we’re going to do, you say ok,” said Hill (A. Hill, personal communication, May 17, 2010). Others say their attitude did not matter at all since it was a corporate decision for them to have the online edition. In those situations, editors said it was more a necessity that the staff take on the online edition. Dees said, “I think we’ve all kind of embraced it and taken it on as something we’ve got to do, especially since we have competition” (L. Dees, personal communication, June 10, 2010). She believes the online edition was something their staff was forced into doing, as they saw the trend among other newspapers.

Those who did not support an online edition initially confessed that their attitude spread among the staff, and their staff members’ attitudes about Internet editions became difficult to alter as a result. McCain, for instance, admitted that his reluctant attitude toward the Internet version swayed the staff. He said, “That is one of the key problems that we’ve had is I’ve had a reluctant attitude about the Web which I am trying to correct. So everybody else had a reluctant attitude as well. I’ve never liked the Web. I can’t get into reading things on the Web, so I don’t comprehend how others could do it” (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010). Beeland’s attitude is so important that the newspaper is scaling back its Web edition based on his decision. “It was probably fairly important because we’re looking at that again now. I’m not real gung ho about it” (T. Beeland, personal communication, May 26, 2010).

The organizational culture of most newspapers has remained the same since editors adopted the Internet editions. Editors said an Internet edition causes newspaper staffs to be flexible enough to upload items onto the Web as they occur. Howell said, “It allows us to be more spontaneous in news coverage” (R. Howell, personal

communication, May 21, 2010). Additionally, Howell argued that having the Internet edition is causing his staff members to make sure they do not miss their most important market while trying to put out a product on two platforms. “Because of the Internet, we have to focus more on news that the other people overlook,” Howell said. “Being a community journalist, I value local news. That’s what we do. We focus on the moms and pops, kindergarten graduations, little league games rather than what is going on nationally that everyone will report on” (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). Nichols declared that the organizational culture of his newspaper has changed in that the staff has to be more computer-conscious. “Everybody is certainly a lot more computer literate. All our reporters are Internet savvy. They are a lot more versatile than they used to be” (W. Nichols, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

In terms of its impact on overall newsrooms, Internet editions caused no loss of newsroom positions or duties, editors said. They explained that it takes the same amount of staff to produce the online edition as the print. Several editors pointed out a couple of positions – photographers and classified ad salespeople – that the Internet could affect. McCain said, “What happens mainly is that the reporter becomes reporter, photographer, videographer, you name it ... you have all of it put into one person. Ten years ago, a photographer went out with a reporter. You basically had two people covering a story” (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010.) Taylor said the entire industry, with the advent of Internet newspapers, is changing the way newspapers are hiring staff. She says positions are becoming more integrated. Where once copy editors did only certain tasks, they now handle a variety of responsibilities. For example, they now take a longer story and shorten it for Web presentation in addition to proofing and writing headlines.

At her paper, the Internet edition is changing everyone into generalists. “Journalism is asking more of its staff. Not only do we expect them to be able to write a story, headlines and cutlines, and take photos, but now we’re asking them to know how to put things on the website or prepare copy to be put on the website,” Taylor said. “This is especially the case with a small newspaper. We have to do everything” (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Because the newspaper websites are not revolutionary, editors said they do not need a separate staff of people to work on the online edition alone. Therefore, some editors are more concerned that some of the qualities that have been associated with newspapers, such as attention to detail and process, will be lost as a result of having Internet editions. According to Thornton, journalists will not spend the time they are used to spending on print stories on putting together Internet content.

Weekly staffs will need continuous training to maintain Internet editions. Training is another area where the current study differs from Pew, Bivings, and RJI research (upon which this research is based). RJI participants indicated that they were getting training for Web publishing from their news organizations. However, most editors in this researcher’s study said their staffs would not have to learn any additional skills to put out the online edition because they planned to continue to produce the edition with the same cut-and-paste format with which they began. However, they list a host of skills that they were already using that they have to fine tune. The most mentioned skill is basic reporting or that of being a competent journalist. Prince said all one really needs to be is “a highly trained and skilled journalist” and the Internet alone does not make one an expert (J. Prince, personal communication, May 11, 2010). McNeece maintains that all the same journalistic rules apply for the online edition, and Ponder believes anyone working on the

Web needs Internet skills plus the ability to accurately cover news events in a fair and unbiased manner. Other, less important skills editors indicated reporters need are computer know-how, particularly skill in updating content. “You simply need access and a basic understanding of how to operate your individual browser as far as updating. I have not found it to be a real complicated process,” he said (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). McCain says one has to know enough about computers to upload items. Turner agreed, saying the staff may need a bit of html knowledge to work on an Internet newspaper but not much more skill than that. “It’s not a whole lot different than what we do in the printed product,” she said (M. Turner, personal communication, June 3, 2010). One editor said a staff member who works on the Internet edition needs to be competent with a computer, the English language, and news style. Those who can multitask are a lot more valuable to a newsroom nowadays, he pointed out. “You’ve got to be versatile in different forms of media. You’ve got to collect, compile, and post it. So there are a little more technological skills needed now,” he said (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). A few editors said it would help if those working on the online edition had a grasp of the basics as well as an eye for video, as most newspapers are starting to integrate video in their sites.

Most editors also admit that they are not doing much to make sure their staffs keep growing technologically. Very few newspapers in the current research are consistent with the Pew report results that found that journalists who can produce content across venues are being hired more at newspapers. A few staffs updated their computers when they launched their editions so everyone could get online properly. Some purchased cameras and other equipment that would aid them in the process. As regular training,

most staffs attend Mississippi Press Association conventions and other workshops to stay abreast of technology. Some publishers said they constantly research the field and look at other newspapers to see what they are doing. In most cases, management leaves it up to individual staff members to stay on top of technology. Only one staff was fortunate enough to have an editor who started out as a page designer so he had a better understanding of Photoshop, Flash, and general uploading knowledge to pass on to them.

Another editor tries to hire young people who have been trained in journalism and video skills who can share their knowledge with the existing staff. However, the problem with that is that a staff member, once he has been out of school for a couple of years, finds that the technology he knows is outdated. Howell said, “It’s pretty demanding keeping up with changes in technology and ways to disburse information that you’re trying to get to your readers” (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). All in all, newspaper editors said they are doing what they can to help the staff stay on top of technology but could not clearly define specific ways they were helping them do so.

These responses reveal that weekly editors may not take training as seriously as respondents in the RJI study in which a majority of them told researchers that their news organizations have provided training such as writing, graphics, layout, or design for Web publishing during the past three years.

Staff sizes are a major reason why weeklies have not changed their operation processes. Some newspapers are unable to go online because they do not have enough people on staff to work on an online edition. None of the newspapers had more than five people in its editorial department. One editor said time spent on the Web edition takes away from time spent on the print product. He explained, “A lot of them (other weeklies)

are like us ... they're small staffed and anything away from the newspaper means one less thing that's in there that you can sell" (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010). Mosby said most weeklies do not have casts of thousands. An Internet edition is one more task for these already overworked staffs. It would be easier if weeklies could outsource all of the work for their Internet edition, but they do not have the money to pay some company to handle the online edition for them. It is for this reason that some editors do not think it worth the effort to invest in the Internet edition. "A lot of those people may not be able to see any direct benefit from having done that" (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Question 3: How is content changing from print editions to Internet versions in Mississippi weekly Internet newspapers?

A further way this research contradicts Bivings research is in the area of content that newspapers are uploading to their Internet edition. Bivings results indicated an increase in technological skills (such as social bookmarking, article commenting, and user-generated content) on newspaper websites. However, just as operation has not changed much for weeklies after adopting an online edition neither has content. This shows that weeklies are not taking advantage of the technological capabilities the Internet offers since most editors are only putting the same content on their Web edition as is in their print edition. In the majority of the cases studied, the newspapers are an exact replica in PDF format of the printed newspaper, which does support one area of the Bivings research that uncovered an increase in PDF editions. The few exceptions of editors going beyond the simple PDF replica are setting trends in the industry for weekly

rural papers. The two most noticeable differences are at the *Calhoun County Journal* and *The Wayne County News* where the distinguishing characteristic is video.

The Web also presents a tremendous opportunity for newspapers to have more of a presence in the community by updating their websites on a regular basis. However, most editors have not grasped this capability either and are only updating their sites once a week, just like they handle their print editions. While most agree that that frequency should change, the majority are sticking to their current uploading frequency. Those who are not changing their frequency is because they say that more frequent Internet content will prevent readers from going to the print edition. Some editors say that if newspapers want to remain competitive, editors will likely have to not only update more often but supplement their uploaded straight-from-the-print-edition content with other content. The cut-and-paste model will have to be eliminated. Thornton said that means editors will have to realize that they are not the only “game in town. You can’t get cocky now. If you don’t have a website that you’re supplementing with stuff other than what’s in the paper, you’re going to probably lose” (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010). McNeece concurred that editors cannot treat the Web edition like a weekly publication because people are accustomed to getting news on that format instantaneously. He explained that the website edition reinforces a newspaper’s name to the community as the place for news and the more it does that the better. Some say updating the site more frequently makes a weekly more relevant to a community. Nichols says a weekly should expect to change because the whole news business has changed. “I think everybody’s got to change” (W. Nichols, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

Still, there are others with extremely opposing views. Hill, for instance, alleged that there is no reason for a weekly to update more frequently because it would be going against its purpose as a “scrapbook paper” (A. Hill, personal communication, May 17, 2010). In that same vein, some question why weeklies should try to imitate dailies by updating more often.

Likewise, Julian Toney believes it is not necessary for a weekly to update its site more than once a week. In his particular case, he does not have the time. He tried more frequent updating for a while with a link he posted on the website front page called “After the Fact.” The link consisted of stories that happen between editions Wednesday and Wednesday. He discontinued it when he did not get response from it one way or the other. “We may [start it back],” he said, “but in small weeklies, you find that people are more laid back and they tend to wait for news. Or they’ve heard it on the street so it doesn’t matter. So they’ll get the full story the following week when it comes out.” Plus, he stated that multiple responsibilities prevent him from making constant updates if he wanted to. “I don’t have the time to spend on trying to see what happened 15 minutes ago and put it on there and another 30 minutes and put it on there. This is probably as far as I’m going to go with it,” said Toney. “In a town this small, there is not that much to keep up with every few minutes anyway” (J. Toney, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

The other way weeklies could take advantage of the technology the Web presents is by adding features to their websites. Besides the routine cut and paste, editors have the capability of adding photo galleries, videos, and assorted other features. It begs to question, then, why editors are not taking advantage of the technology. Brooks Taylor is one editor who believes it is imperative for weeklies to keep up with the level of

technology that their readership is comfortable with or stay a little ahead of them. That means converging different forms of media and exploring all the features that their readership may be using or would use. Taylor said, “I think you’ll begin to see a lot more smaller newspapers like mine put video clips on their websites because they may not have a television station in the area. I think we’ll become more integrated in the way we present news” (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010). All these results are consistent with earlier reports that the weeklies included in this study do not view the Internet editions as ways to better their newspapers, which participants in the RJI do.

The greater part of the editors has taken the extra step of viewing the websites of other newspapers on a frequent basis to keep up with the industry. The main reasons editors provided for viewing other sites are to remain on top of industry trends or find ideas to incorporate into their newspapers. Most editors believe that their websites compare favorably to what they are seeing. “We’re doing almost as good as many and better than a lot of papers” (C. Chesser, personal communication, May 6, 2010). They agree that most of the content on websites is an exact duplicate of what appears in most newspapers’ print editions, especially for weeklies. Editors even pointed out a few trends among the content they view online. First, mostly breaking news stories make it to the website, not features or community news, they noted. Also, Internet stories are much shorter than print stories. Stories are typically briefs or teasers that the newspaper indicates will be developed further in their print edition or online. They attributed the length of online stories to people’s shorter attention spans nowadays. Thornton said, “People just want you to bottom line it now ... tell them how it hits them and their back yard” (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010). On the other hand, editors

stated that the Internet may be improving the distribution of news but rushing editors so much that it is hurting the accuracy and depth of news. In addition, the Internet is cutting down the amount of investigative news that is reported, they said. McCain stated, “For some of the ones I’ve seen, you can tell that they uploaded the Internet stories probably 20-30 minutes after they were written. Nobody read through it. I think there’s a lot more errors in Internet stories than in the print edition stories” (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010). Editors said the swiftness of the Internet could force an editor to upload stories before they can be fully checked for accuracy. At the same time, its format can help by forcing journalists to make their writing more concise, they added.

Because you can do it so quickly, you might end up getting something out there that turns out to not be as accurate as you would like it to be. When you publish once a week, you usually have the time to be more thorough. It helps us because you know no one is going to read a really long story on the Internet so have to write better, more concisely. You have to say as much as you can in as small a space as you can and that’s what we’re supposed to be doing anyway. (M.

Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010)

Editors, like James Prince, are only concerned with the websites of major newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* because they have the resources to devote to online editions and thus have a better idea of what the industry as a whole is doing. Other editors profess that there are dangers to watching what other newspapers are doing and, therefore, refuse to look at other newspaper websites. They say it is easy to “get caught up” with what other editors are doing and forget what they are supposed to be doing (W. Prather, personal communication, May 6, 2010). Several

choose to stay away from other newspaper websites altogether because they prefer their print edition or do not have the time to surf other sites.

A few editors confessed that they are not pleased with their websites because of the lack of features they contain. They declare that their newspapers are somewhat simple and archaic to others they have seen. Part of the choice to have a simple website is a decision several editors intentionally made to cater to their demographic. Howell, for instance, lives in a rural section of the county where few people have high-speed Internet access. To have a site with all the bells and whistles would take some of his readers half a day to download, he said. Also, Ponder could have the features on his site but chooses not to. Instead, his newspaper likes to focus on bettering their content.

Editors are trying an array of measures to keep their sites appealing and visitors coming back. Their strategies are different from the ones mentioned in the Bivings report. Rather than the social bookmarking and tactics to increase direct reader involvement with the website, most weekly editors focus on overall appearance and use of the site. There are several approaches that all the editors interviewed strive for to keep the sites attractive. The majority try to do three things – keep the site simple, easy to navigate, and focus on local content. Many mentioned that they do not want to put too much information on the site to frustrate browsers. McNeece tries to make his site as simple as possible. “I don’t like a lot of clutter. I want it to be easy for people to find what they’re looking for and move around on the site,” he said (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). Nichols said what makes their site appealing is its neatness and ease of navigation. Some rely so heavily on local content because they do not want to stray from their print model of providing local content. Howell stresses “local, local, local” on his

site. A few other editors believe some additional tactics, like photographs and frequent updates, are driving traffic for them. Hill believes the “quality” pictures and direct links to subjects or topics sets their online newspaper apart. In the same way, Turner adds as many photographs as she can. She also keeps the obituaries updated because they are a popular search topic on her site. Morris tries to present items so that they are pleasing to the eye. She adds pictures of columnists, which she believes gives readers more of a personal feel to the paper and the people who work to put it out. Some editors went to drastic measures like completely redesigning their website to boost attraction to it. Toney says changing his front page each week increases visitors to the site. “That gives everyone an opportunity to see that we’re staying updated because the updated version is always there,” he said (J. Toney, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Mississippi weeklies are seeing a range of traffic to their websites, and print circulation seems to be an indicator of that flow. The average print circulation among the editors’ papers in this study is 2,500. Their Internet traffic varies as does the way that editors measure it. Editors trace visits to their sites in three ways – hits, unique visitors, and page views. Hits occur when someone logs onto or hits a Web page deliberately or simply when the Internet pulls up a site’s home page when starting a computer. In the latter case, the viewer may not actually browse the site. He only landed on it. Therefore, editors say it is not an accurate measure of usage. Ironically, the most popular way of measuring traffic is through hits. In terms of such, the average monthly website hits for the newspapers is 3,540, with the lowest being 800 and the highest 70,000. Another way that editors trace traffic is by counting unique visitors or those who visit a Web page once within 24 hours, regardless of how many times they access a site. This cuts down on

counting the same visitor more than once in a 24-hour period. Most editors deem this a more accurate way of measuring traffic to a website. The third way that editors count traffic is by evaluating page views. When a server recognizes an individual as being a unique visitor, then it begins to count how many different pages they visit while they are on the website. For example, if a unique visitors visit four different pages while they are on the website, the page view count would be four. This is a helpful way of tracking visitors because it allows editors to see what content is accessed most on their sites.

Editors have their explanation for why readers keep coming back to the site. The main reasons are for the local content and frequency of updates. Editors say readers also log in for items that are missing in the print edition, like the loads of photographs they are able to put on the Web. According to editors, they will send someone to cover an event or they will cover it and only run a couple of photographs in their print edition. They upload the rest to the Internet because there is no page limit on it as in the print edition. Above and beyond, editors say local content makes all the difference in Internet interest. "People are aware that we do update the site. They click on it to see if it's an update. If there's no update, they're out" (J. Prince, personal communication, May 11, 2010). Morris agreed that people keep coming back to their site for its hometown news. She said, "People like to have a paper that tells them what's going on in their town" (N. Morris, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Toney said his visitors are coming back for the front page stories, legal advertisements, and the obituaries, all of which are free on the main page. He said, "The majority of your big ticket stories are on the front page and my front page is on the site. So I guess they're interested enough to see the main things happening" (J. Toney,

personal communication, June 10, 2010). Worrell also expressed her belief about readers coming back for the updates. “As long as they see that things are being added, they’ll keep coming back to see what else is going on” (M. Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010). These opinions, which do not incorporate the interactive features mentioned in the Bivings study, are fairly consistent among editors. The majority of editors agree, whether they are right or wrong, on what features attract visitors to their sites.

Question 4: How much is it costing Mississippi weekly newspapers to publish an Internet edition and how much are they making from them?

The biggest issue that a mass of editors struggle with concerning the Web edition is how to make money from it. This is an area that none of the studies (Pew, Bivings, or RJI) addressed directly. However, it is an area the researcher deemed important to explore because it could provide insight into editor decisions related to the Internet editions. The results uncovered important findings. First, less than a handful of Mississippi weeklies involved in this study are making a profit from their websites. The majority are only breaking even. It could be that most weeklies are not making money with the sites because leadership has no clear plan in place to operate them. Most have no clear business model for operation and are only getting by with the Web edition. Many editors say they are “making it up as we go,” “flying by the seat of our pants” or have in their heads the method they plan to use to make money on the sites (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010; P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Largely, weekly editors have generated revenue by trial and error, which is the plan they have followed since the day several newspapers opened their doors. Few have yet to get a

plan on paper or implement anything solid. However, some editors say weeklies do not need a structured business model because they are mostly mom-and-pop operations. Most business models are in the forms of practical sayings like “stay local, stay interesting and hope for the best” or “watch your numbers” that offer no solid direction for making money (C. Picard, personal communication, June 9, 2010). Several weekly editors depend on years of experience or doing what they have done for so long to take them from year to year. Some business models are more practical such as keep costs low by maintaining small staffs or watching every penny. A few editors concentrate more on the product and let the financial end work out on its own. “If we’re putting out a top quality product, then the business end takes care of itself” (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). Still, other editors argue that the nature of Internet newspapers warrant that they not be restricted to a firm business model. Keane said, “If I sit here and put some rigid business model in place for the Internet, it’s going to eat me alive. I’ve got to be able to make it up as I go along. It’s changing faster than I can change” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Second, going online prematurely has caused some newspapers to struggle in their Web paper operation, editors noted. Most valued simply having an online presence over the ability to make money with the sites and have had to go back and change their online format. Alan Hill faced that problem and was forced to decide if he would risk losing readers to gain revenue from the Web edition. “When we first went online, I made it available to anybody who wanted it. They could see the whole paper, and I began to lose circulation” (A. Hill, personal communication, May 17, 2010). Now that Web editions have been around for a while, many editors do not know how to balance them and the

print editions. Only a few editors admitted that they carefully weighed the measures they wanted to take before going online, and for some, the decision was just a matter of finding the right company to handle their website. However, all the editors pondered the decision of whether to have a paid or free site. According to Thornton, most anybody in the business will declare that anybody who has a totally free site now regrets it. “We wanted to start out the way we were going to be because it’s very hard if you start giving it for free and then turn around later and tell them you want them to pay for it” (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010). Prather adamantly believes that newspapers made a huge mistake with the way they initially approached the Internet. He said most that made those mistakes have a hard time recouping the audience they lost to their Internet edition when they started to charge for it. “They’re giving away so much of what makes folks pick up the paper that the print edition is suffering. They’ve shot themselves in the foot trying to be up to date and snazzy... they’re giving away the cow and the milk” (W. Prather, personal communication, May 6, 2010). Publishers like McNeece believe there is no way editors can go back after initially offering the content for free and try to charge readers for it. He says newspapers have been offering so much content for free so long now that trying to get money from them at this point is difficult to do. “Personally, I think the genie is out of the bottle somewhat,” McNeece said. “They (readers) are just going to look elsewhere to see if they can find it for free” (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). To prevent giving away content for free, some editors have gone so far as to not post anything online until it appears in the print edition. An overwhelming majority of editors only offer portions of stories or teasers that they

hope will entice readers to purchase a print edition or subscribe to get access to the full content on the online edition.

Third, even though editors are dealing with a different method of delivering news, they rely on traditional money-making measures like advertising sales to supplement the site. The problem is that they continue to rely on the same smaller merchants to support the paper because there are no large businesses in many rural areas. Consequently, these small businesses end up buying as much as they can and have no funds left to pay for Internet ads. A grave disappointment to editors is that the hype about Internet newspaper advertising that was so rampant when Internet newspapers started has not turned out to be what the majority of editors thought it would be. Advertisers are not supporting the newspaper websites as editors thought they would. Nevertheless, advertising costs should not be blamed for the low advertising support. Editors are offering so many options for advertising online that a business is bound to find a fee that they are willing to pay.

Advertisers have four options open to them by weeklies: be included on the Web as part of a bundled print package, pay an extra fee for Web advertising, advertise on the Web only, or forgo advertising on the Web altogether. Few newspapers include the Web advertising free of charge, as a bonus for advertising in the print edition. The bulk of editors offer advertisers the bundled packages that merge both media. Advertisers that commit to a long-term print contract can sometimes get the Web advertising as a plus. The business can be charged weekly fees as low as \$20-\$40 a week, monthly fees from \$25 to \$150 and up depending on the placement of the ad on the site, the interactivity readers have with it, the features put into it, and the amount of time it appears online. The banner advertisement positioned across the top of the websites is usually more expensive

and sells on a yearly contract price at most newspapers. There are a few cases where advertisers are charged based on the number of hits they get to their site from the newspaper's site. Regardless of cost, Internet advertising is nowhere near as much as print advertising, editors said. Some stated that there is just enough on their sites to pay what it costs them to pay the hosting company to put things on the Internet. McCain said Internet advertising is not even close to half a percentage of the overall sales of his newspaper (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010). One editor admitted that weekly editors have not done a good job selling the benefits of online advertising to local businesses. Howell said, "We're in the same boat with a lot of other small newspapers. It's hard to get local small businesses to embrace the amount of information and viewers that you have. So the challenge is getting local businesses to support you and market through you" (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

All in all, editors do not believe the cost of advertising is so exorbitant that businesses cannot afford it. Therefore, if cost is not the reason advertisers are not publicizing their businesses as much on the Web edition as in print, then they must have other reasons. According to one editor, a lot of advertisers are hesitant about the benefits of the Web because they have a more difficult time tracking sales from Internet usage. Another editor said advertisers do not wish to pay extra money on the Web because they theorize that most people looking at their online ads would not live in their county and consequently not spend money with them. Some editors contrarily believe that having people outside the county view the advertisement online gets a different type of potential customer than in the print edition. The businesses that have advertised online prefer to have interactive links through which people can connect to their sites. Possible reasons

abound. One editor said that Internet penetration is so low in his county that there are only a handful of businesses in his community that actually have a website. Since the majority of businesses do not have a website, newspaper editors have a difficult time convincing those business owners to advertise online (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). Editors themselves could be limiting their own business. For example, some will block a business from advertising in their print edition if the business owner does not want to advertise online. Their colleagues allege that doing so for every print advertiser is more trouble than it is worth. Plus, they report that it is an injustice to not offer the subscriber everything he pays for in the print edition, advertising included.

Many editors are puzzled as to why businesses do not advertise online more because most advertisers love the extra coverage they get. It gives advertisers one more level of exposure for their businesses, and, in most cases, advertisers can see from their own servers how many people come from the newspaper site to theirs. Some like the Web because it enables them to reach into other areas and question why more businesses will not take advantage of the expanded coverage, especially when there is a market for it. Howell said, “We know we have the audience out there, but we just haven’t convinced our advertisers to embrace the website. I’ve got the numbers, but they are not interested in buying” (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). Nonetheless, editors are going out of their way to encourage businesses to advertise online. Besides the bundled cost packages, newspapers offer Web brochures, button ads that link a reader directly to the advertiser’s site, ads that blink and flash, and color ads for some newspapers that still print in only black and white. A few editors say that rather than adding bells and whistles

to newspaper sites, editors and publishers should concentrate on better serving their advertisers and readers by including as much content in the newspaper.

A portion of the editors insist that newspapers not rely on their traditional money-making measures and concentrate on strengthening their content to boost sales of both editions. Mosby, for instance, contends that newspaper editors are going to have to be smarter in their operation. He noted that one of the greatest mindsets newspaper editors will have to overcome is the industry-wide philosophy of more advertising and less news that emerged with the influx of corporate ownership in the last quarter century. There is going to have to be more investment in the news product if newspapers plan to continue to succeed, he said. “More and more I have seen the development industry wide of this philosophy of stress advertising, stress advertising and news is what we fill in between the ads” (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010). His newspaper, which is making money without an online edition, is proof that if editors invest some resources and time in creating the editorial product that people want and need, advertising revenue will follow. Mosby added, “If you build the news content of your paper and develop the trust and reliance upon that within your population, the advertising will follow. I think that newspapers make a serious mistake when they get away from that which they do best, and what we do best is to take a complex situation and tell people what it means to them” (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

The other major income source for Internet newspapers is reader subscriptions. There are a plethora of options for readers in terms of how they can get and pay for Internet newspapers. A number of readers can get all the content posted from some newspapers free of charge. Some only get teasers that tempt them to pay a little more for

the print or online edition. Typically, readers can view breaking news, obituaries, and advertisements for free, but they have to subscribe to the newspaper to be able to read full text stories or the PDF pages. The majority of newspapers grant readers free access to the Web edition when they subscribe to the newspaper. Once readers obtain a subscription, they are given a password by which they can log onto the site and view full text of stories. In most cases, the Web edition is only a few dollars more. The average cost for print and Web subscriptions is \$35. Other readers who do not want or need the print edition can subscribe only to the online edition at most newspapers. The average cost for the Web subscription only is \$30. For the reader looking for a specific article in one issue, some newspapers charge a minimal fee for that one article. Many newspapers offer a 30-day trial period to both editions to potential subscribers who usually end up subscribing to both editions. They get the online edition for its immediacy and the print edition for its cut and keep capability, editors said.

Overall, editors agree that they have to charge readers for the content. Some insist that giving away the content for free devalues the print edition and ultimately the newspaper in general in the minds of readers. Others, who started free editions, have regretted it and had to rethink their pay structure. Taylor said that Internet editions affect weeklies by pitting the print edition against them. "That's one reason we went to the pay model. We can't continue to ask our subscribers to pay and somebody else can get it for free online. More newspapers will come to that conclusion" (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Picard added that there has been some resistance for people traditionally to pay for Internet content, but content is all newspapers really have

to sell. She asked, “Why would anyone subscribe to the paper if they can just go online and read it?” (C. Picard, personal communication, June 9, 2010).

Some newspapers have not seen any repercussions from charging readers for content because they have not had to change their fee structure since they started. They began the online edition the way they planned to continue it with a pay model. Some editors have considered experimenting with restrictions by putting some content, like the jail docket, behind a pay wall. On the other hand, some editors said charging readers for the Web content has helped their business overall. They say it has enabled the newspapers to save printing and postage costs as many distant subscribers have canceled their print subscription for the online subscription. According to Taylor, charging for the online edition should benefit rather than hurt print revenue. Print subscribers get free access to their website so the newspaper would not be losing any print subscribers. Instead, most of their website subscribers are people who cannot get their hands on a print edition easily. “We’re getting some revenue that we weren’t getting, and they’re getting it right when they want it. That’s helped us to stem the tide of losing print subscribers to our website” (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Question 5: What barriers do Mississippi weekly newspaper editors believe there are to publishing Internet editions in non-metro communities?

This is an area not addressed by Pew, Bivings, and RJI reports, either. However, these barriers could be the key to explaining the success or failure of existing and potential Internet editions. By and large, editors credit fear, tradition, and limited resources with keeping other weeklies offline. They report that some of their colleagues have let the fear of the unknown and seemingly intimidating technology keep them from

attempting a Web edition. They point to family-run weeklies with staff members they report are set on doing things the way they have always been done. This point is valid given that one of the newspapers in this study is still printing their news copy, cutting it with scissors, and gluing it onto a page that a camera photographs before printing. Hence, it appears that technology has not moved into every part of the state (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010; M. Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Age could be a factor in how eager editors are to embrace Internet editions. Rupert Howell, who has been in the newspaper business and at the same newspaper since 1975, admitted that a great deal of the older journalists do not embrace technology like a younger person would. "A lot of us are old technophobes. We've done things the same way for so many years. It scares us" (R. Howell, personal communication, May 21, 2010). Ponder agreed that younger journalists are the ones pushing for more change in the industry. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect these smaller family-owned weeklies, typically managed and owned by a person who grew up without using computers or Internet technology, to change just because technology has changed. "They're stuck in their ways, and they dictate policy. They're going to continue to do exactly what they've been doing, successfully I might add, for years. There's no reason or motivation for them to change" (J. Ponder, personal communication, May 24, 2010). Other editors quickly dismiss the idea of an Internet edition because they figure that they do not have the initial investment to start one and cannot see themselves garnering an initial return on that investment within a certain period of time.

A more significant reason for newspapers not going online is the limited Internet access in some counties. The majority of the editors work in counties where broadband access is slim and most of their readers seldom use the Internet. Turner pointed out that the Internet does not mean a great deal to her readers. “We’ve found that many of our long-time subscribers aren’t on the Internet that much” (M. Turner, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Hill’s subscribers are in a similar predicament. Many of them live below the poverty level, are computer illiterate, and do not have access to a computer nor the Internet. It is a problem shared by a large portion of weekly editors. Hill said he does not believe his newspaper will be completely online because of the demographics of the county. “If the people in our community all had computers and they were all online, we could do it and it would be a lot less expensive than trying to put out a print edition. You could cover more with less cost if you were only online” (A. Hill, personal communication, May 17, 2010). Limited Internet access is a problem Keane faces in his county as well. Only 20% of the residents there are wired for high-speed Internet, he noted. Editors are hopeful that the number of households with a computer and thus Internet access is going to rise, which should increase interest in Internet newspapers. When that time comes, weeklies have to compete, Taylor pointed out. “We have to stay in the mix with all the different options that people have” (B. Taylor, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

A lesser obstacle to going online that editors mentioned was the threat the online edition poses to the print product. They fear too much focus on the Web edition will take away from the monetary aspects and reader interest in the print edition, which has been the backbone of the industry. Editors, across the board, say that the print edition takes

precedence over the online edition and always will in their minds. The online edition is merely an adjunct to what they are doing with the printed news. Editors are certain that print editions are here to stay for the foreseeable future, especially for the smaller markets. According to them, print adds a benefit that the online site never will. Bolen stated that there will always be a print newspaper because not everybody is going to have a computer at home. “Your older people don’t have computers, so they’re going to rely on print. Not everything you print is going to be on the website, so that print newspaper will tell the whole story where that website never will” (W. Bolen, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Some editors believe the impact of charging for content is an area about which they do not have to worry. They speculate that the revenue from the website should benefit newspapers and dedicated readers will still subscribe to the print edition. Worrell, for one, said people who want the actual physical paper are still going to pay for it. “I don’t believe that the online edition is going to be a substitute. I think it can increase our revenue for the people who are out of town” (M. Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

This finding opposes RJI study findings concerning the treatment of both editions as integrated products suited for different platforms. Weekly editors in this researcher’s study view the products as having different relevance with the print edition being more important than the online edition. They consider the Internet edition as an extra or a product that they could do without, and thus treat it as so.

Several editors have wrestled with the decision of going online so much that they still have not done so. Five editors interviewed in this study have yet to adopt an Internet edition, but all have contemplated the idea. The commonalities among all these editors

are that they work on small staffs where one or two people do everything and, for the most part, have small circulation newspapers. People like 51-year-old Gaila Oliver and 60-year-old Betty Little wear so many hats at their newspapers that they do not have the time to devote to an online edition. Both started their newspapers from the ground up as a service to the community. Oliver started her newspaper 13 years ago and Little 12 years ago as their first attempts in the newspaper business. Oliver is the only one on her staff. She serves as editor, publisher, photographer, ad sales person, and the billing clerk. Little is one of two on staff. She shares various responsibilities with the other employee. These editors easily work 18 hours a day, five days a week. Their circulations are 850 and 1,500, respectively. What has kept them offline so far is lack of time and knowledge. They realize that it would take some website understanding to be able to work on an Internet version and admit that they do not know much about working on the Web. Neither does Cindy Picard, who works with a slightly larger staff than Oliver and Little but not big enough to free her enough to learn the skills to simply upload content to the Web. Unlike the other two editors, she works at a newspaper that is corporately owned. She said, "I don't know how to do it, and at this point and time we don't have the additional money to pay someone to do it. Nor do I have the time to sit down and learn how to do it on my own" (C. Picard, personal communication, June 9, 2010).

Wade Bolen, too, works at a corporately-owned newspaper with a small staff to put it out. His newspaper opted for a Facebook page over a full newspaper website for its ease of updating. The 49-year-old said he chose the Facebook page based on the size and makeup of the town. It takes less effort to update a Facebook page than a full-blown newspaper website, he said. He also started the page to keep hometown soldiers serving

in Afghanistan in contact with local news. “A weekly newspaper is very small staffed, and to keep up with a website takes a lot of manpower, and weeklies don’t have that manpower” (W. Bolen, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

The last editor whose newspaper does not have an Internet edition has what he believes is a good explanation for it. Harold Mosby, who has been in the newspaper business nearly 33 years, makes a convincing case for why a weekly newspaper editor should consider seriously forgoing the online edition. He does not want his decision to have an Internet edition to put him out of business. He would rather the market dictate whether he remains in business. He partly credits his decision to stay offline to the biggest myth he heard when Internet editions came out and that was that newspapers would be able to make a great deal of money through its online advertising. “When e-editions first came out, they became all the rage. The great allure at that time was that we were going to make a fortune on Internet advertising,” Mosby recollected. “Well, everybody has figured out there is no unmined gold mine of newspaper Internet advertising. It hasn’t turned out to be” (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Mosby especially considered that he would not make that much money in his particular market, one that spans two of the poorest counties in Mississippi. Though his colleagues were telling him that he was just being “a dinosaur” about the situation, Mosby was adamant that he knew his market better than them. To him, it does not make sense to have the online edition. “At best all I would be doing is taking it out of my news pages and putting it on there. It would be going in one pocket and out the other” said Mosby (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Mosby believes other weeklies that have not gone online may have editors and publishers on their staffs who

think as he does about the Web's reported benefit of increased advertising. He adds that in his small Mississippi Delta town, the newspaper is lucky enough to get an advertisement from Vicksburg or Greenville for its print edition. He said his advertisers cannot be convinced of the value.

Another reason Mosby does not support online editions is because he believes newspapers are abandoning their primary platform by moving their content online and thus competing with all of the other online media. "Our medium is paper. It's print. It always has been and to some degree always will have to be," said Mosby. "Why would we, then, join the rest of the chorus to get people to go to another medium, i.e. a computer, rather than ours?" (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Additionally, Mosby stressed that the online edition does not have the security the print newspaper provides readers. There are many people in his circulation area who will not believe the rumor mill until they see the story appear on their print pages, he added. "There is something to a lot of people that is more real to see it in print, and I think we make a mistake when we encourage people to go to another medium for their news rather than the one in which we specialize" (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Another common thread among these editors is that they assume that their circulations are not large or diverse enough to warrant having an Internet edition. According to them, an Internet edition may not quite serve the needs of their communities, which are largely made up of older readers who are not online readers. Oliver said, "About 70% of my readers do not even have a computer. I just don't think they would be using it. They like to get that paper edition every week" (G. Oliver, personal communication, May 20, 2010). Little expressed similar remarks, saying, "A lot

of the rural communities have older readers and that's been my main concern about going to the Internet. I don't want to alienate the older community because getting that newspaper is part of their life" (B. Little, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Like their counterparts who have Internet editions, these editors are concerned about the implications an Internet edition would have on their print edition and overall revenue. The difference between them and their colleagues is that these editors have not taken the risk to pursue the online edition. They are sure that they would not want a free site, though. Little is concerned that not charging for Internet content has hurt those newspapers who did not handle it wisely in the beginning. "I don't understand the concept of putting your product online for everyone to see with no charge. That's why, in my opinion, subscription sales have dropped so much for some papers," Little said. "But now the community newspapers have kind of weathered the storm. It hasn't affected us as bad as the big newspapers" (B. Little, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Mosby believes the entire practice of offering content for free on the website violates a couple of old-standing capitalistic business principles, the best of which is why give away something one is trying to sell. The second is what he presumes is psychological. He says humans put more value on things that they pay for than they do on things that are free. Therefore, readers would not value the online edition as much because it is not something that they would pay for. He pointed to the big dailies as an example of this. He said those newspapers throw free copies in the yards of nonsubscribers hoping to gain some customers, and those newspapers end up being torn up by dogs or thrown away. He attributed that to his premise that people are not paying for those editions. "Even if people are only paying 50 cents for something, then that is something that has more

worth to them than something that's free. They're invested, even if it's only 50 cents. That's something they're going to look at" (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Still, these editors do not doubt the importance or value of an online edition for a newspaper. All of them view the websites of other newspapers on a regular basis. Picard deemed an online presence important because the Internet is important, and to Bolen the Web edition is an asset to a larger paper, not necessarily a small weekly. However, his newspaper has not completely ruled out the decision to have a site. They revisit the idea occasionally and will continue to reconsider it to see if there is any way that they can do it, but it is not in the near future. Little professed that she has been thinking about having an online edition for some time but wants to make sure she approaches it the right way. Similarly, Oliver is just as cautious. She sees the circulation boost that the Internet edition would provide to the print edition. She believes it would especially draw people who have moved away from Leland. For all editors, an Internet edition would cut some of their expense of printing and mailing print editions drastically. Oliver stated that her newspaper would be in much better financial shape with the online edition only and without the print. "It [the print edition] is very costly. Money wise, I'd come out a lot better. Printing costs and postage would be eliminated. The online edition would be a lot more economical" (G. Oliver, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Picard is already weighing how her newspaper could handle an online edition. She believes her publication cannot compete on the Internet level. "We're a community, scrapbook-style newspaper. That's what our niche is, and that's the purpose we fulfill. To go online, I think would diminish the value of the paper" (C. Picard, personal communication, June 9, 2010).

Mosby said it is going to take some persuading for his newspaper to be there.

“Somebody’s going to have to convince me that I’m not going to cut my own throat when I do it,” he said (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Were they ever to go online, these editors already have an idea about the type of content they would post. Their ideas vary from the Bivings finding that content increases have been in the area of more interactive features. Little knows for sure that her online content would have to be drastically different from her print content. As a faithful newspaper reader her entire life, she divulged that she canceled her subscription to the state’s largest paper, *The Clarion-Ledger*, when she found out she could get everything she wanted from their website for free. “I used to buy a paper [*Clarion-Ledger*] every day of my life. I was brought up in a home with the newspaper and always had one,” Little explained. “A few years ago, I quit buying *The Clarion-Ledger* because I can go online and hit the hot spots, obituaries, and breaking news” (B. Little, personal communication, June 10, 2010). *The Clarion-Ledger* has since gone to a “print exclusive” model in which they reserve some of their content for print only. Oliver is not completely sure of the specifics of the content she would provide, but she does know that she does not want to print anything that presents her community in a negative light and thus deters people from moving to the area. She said she will likely explore a Facebook page first, mainly to connect readers to the newspaper.

It is no mystery that these editors face the same struggles to keep their print editions in business as those newspapers with both editions. They, too, have no solid business models in place but follow comparable actions of their peers. Some editors implement strategies, such as circulation drives and participation in community events, to

have a greater presence in the public. Those are two failsafe strategies that are always ongoing, Picard explained. Little centers her business plan on special editions. A graduation edition, Christmas edition, and football edition are stretched throughout the year to make money. The paper also runs monthly specials to target their non-regular advertisers. She said, “Money is an issue with just about all your small newspapers. We try to think outside of the box to bring in revenue from businesses that we don’t normally have advertise with us on a regular basis. I have advertisers that are very loyal because they know the importance of a small newspaper” (B. Little, personal communication, June 10, 2010).

Right now, these editors are concentrating on enhancing their print editions. Oliver is hoping the secret to doing that is in the content as she tries to give the readers as many human interest stories as possible to boost readership of her print edition. Her thinking is similar to Bolen’s who strives to boost readership by making sure to publish human interest stories that offer a fresh perspective to readers. In addition to that, his staff talks to their readers to make sure they are covering the news that they want to see in the newspaper. Mosby believes what his newspaper is doing must be working because they have not lost 50 subscriptions in three years. The newspaper runs the occasional promotion, but their circulation varies 10% up or down in any given year, Mosby noted.

Question 6: What do Mississippi weekly editors foresee as the future of Internet newspapers in the state?

Finally, results regarding weekly editors’ views about the future of Internet newspapers and newspapers in general are consistent with Pew findings that showed editors predicting greater danger for the future of larger newspapers as opposed to those

at smaller ones. The Pew study also suggested newspapers were having two completely different experiences. Smaller newspapers are better connected to their communities with more deeply involved readerships and, thus experience greater permanence. Results in this researcher's study indicate that weekly newspapers have the greater advantage over dailies in terms of Internet production because they can be daily papers without the expense of dailies. A greater part of the editors said the Internet edition is a complement to their print edition. It gives their newspaper a chance to deliver the news faster than in print. Editor Julian Toney gained about 40 online subscribers mostly because those people did not want to have to wait a week for their hard copy to come in the mail. Having a website means weekly subscribers get some kind of news every day. Weeklies can now inform readers between editions whereas readers had to go days without information in the print model. "It is old news by the time they get it so they enjoy getting their news on time or early" (J. Toney, personal communication, June 10, 2010). McNeece indicated that having the Internet covers all the bases for a weekly. "It allows you to be the weekly, community newspaper that is so strong and at the same time be the daily paper that can provide information to your readers on a 24-7 basis. I don't see how you can have one without the other" (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). Editors also argue that the Internet edition helps them to be able, maybe not to compete with daily papers, but keep up with them because that is what their readers have come to expect from the 24-hour news cycle. Turner said, "It's helping us to stay more current. But also the print edition helps us to get more in depth on some issues that people can take the time to sit down and digest" (M. Turner, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

A few editors said the Internet edition makes their newspapers much more than a daily. “It’s really changed us into a daily newspaper ... and a TV station and a radio station” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Thornton likes to think of it as having a “weekly paper and daily website” (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 11, 2010). The main advantage weeklies have and what is keeping them profitable is their abundance of local content, editors stressed. Weeklies offer what a reader cannot get by surfing the website of a daily, Ponder noted. The bulk of the editors agree that weekly newspapers have a greater advantage over dailies when it comes to producing stories for the Internet. They have more time to gather details to add depth to stories and “make sure we do it right” (C. Chesser, personal communication, May 6, 2010).

Editors suggested that dailies’ content is shifting more to a community newspaper model in which there is less national and international news, which is found in abundance to anyone with a computer, and more of a focus on their residents. They said that dailies have gotten so out of touch with their communities that they are not a threat for weeklies anymore. “If they ever wake up and start covering the local stuff that they should be covering, then they could be a threat” (C. Chesser, personal communication, May 6, 2010). Regardless of what the Internet is doing to or for newspapers, weekly editors are optimistic about them and their potential. Whether they use the Internet edition as “a promotional tool” or a way to “get our local news out to the world,” editors report that the best part about having both editions is that one can complement or market the other (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010; J. Prince, personal communication, May 11, 2010).

Editors have mixed opinions on the future of Internet newspapers in rural areas in which the largest part of them are located. Some do not see Internet newspapers going away ever rather editors adapting themselves to the new format. Furthermore, Internet newspapers in rural areas are going to be “a fact of life” that people are going to have to get used to (M. Worrell, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Others confirmed that Internet newspapers are going to exist but will likely be most accessed by distant natives of the areas in which they serve and secondary to people in the counties. “People are going to use them but mostly from other states. In my community, most people are going to stick to the print edition” (J. McCain, personal communication, May 20, 2010). Several expect usage in their areas to pick up among a newer age group. Howell forecasted that Internet newspapers in rural areas will increase as more people, especially younger generations, start getting interested in current events. Simultaneously, increased Internet access through cell towers or cable will boost readership and usage.

Others predicted that Internet newspapers will survive in rural areas over the next decade but will enjoy limited success due mainly to the low penetration of high-speed Internet access in these areas. There are many rural areas that to this day do not have high-speed Internet access, and in some cases, no Internet access. “Rural communities in states like Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama are examples of that. For those folks to go online takes forever. I don’t see that being a quick changeover” (J. Ponder, personal communication, May 24, 2010). Nichols has a different idea of how weeklies will handle their Internet edition. He proposed that readers will start to see more newspapers offer paid-for content. Readers will be able to get a couple of paragraphs from the beginning of print stories and forced to subscribe if they want more.

There are others who have completely opposite views of the Internet's survival in rural areas. Oliver, for instance, believes the Internet edition will phase out in rural areas and will never be solely online due to funding costs and reader interest. Toney implied that Internet newspapers have reached their pinnacle in rural areas. "I think it's going to stay about like it is. You can get anything you want really. How much further can you go?" he said (J. Toney, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Buckley stated that "the drastic change has already happened" with Internet newspapers (Z. Buckley, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Freret, too, is skeptical about the prospect of the Internet newspaper continuing in rural areas. She said her newspaper has a site only to be able to say it has a site. "I don't see much of a future whatsoever in it. Being a person who lives in the country, I do not have fast access DSL. I have dial-up. There are so many in the rural community who don't even have a computer, much less access to the Internet. I don't see it going anywhere" (H. Freret, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Mosby will be surprised if Internet newspapers in rural area continue to exist. "I'll be very surprised if in the foreseeable future that becomes any mainstay ... any sort of real, huge influential part. I just don't see it" (H. Mosby, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

A few editors said weeklies face a much different problem – competition from other online sources. That threat is already a reality in McCain's county. A competitor has launched a news website with advertising, news snippets, videos, photographs, and links to McCain's site for actual news stories. He called it is a problem many newspapers will face in the future. In fact, he mentioned three other newspapers that were dealing with the same situation. Nichols assented. "Nowadays anybody with a computer

connection can set themselves up as a blogger and distribute out information” (W. Nichols, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

No matter how successful Internet editions get, they will never take the place of print newspapers, editors declared. The majority do not believe that there will be online news only ever, even if newspapers have to revert to magazine format or a one-sheet broadsheet to remain in print. Editors said that there will be a market for the printed product always whether from readers or advertisers needing printed copies of their ads. Nichols said, “I think there will always be people out there who like to hold things in their hands. They like to have a hard copy” (W. Nichols, personal communication, May 28, 2010). Little pointed out that there is a place for both editions in rural areas. “They work hand in hand with the print news” (B. Little, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Should the print newspaper ever become obsolete, it will not fade away in their lifetimes, according to most editors.

For a long time, they’re going to stay exactly how they are and the Internet editions are going to slowly be worked in. It’s going to be a long time before the community newspaper goes away as far as the print product. I think people like the way they smell and feel and like to be able to touch it and cut it out and stick it away in a scrapbook. (C. Chesser, personal communication, May 6, 2010)

As for the future of the entire newspaper industry, the majority of editors agree that the weekly, community newspapers have a bright future because they still provide community news that a reader cannot get any place else. They believe some of the larger daily metros do not have as promising an outlook because their costs to produce them are greater and their content is not unique. Most weekly editors predict that dailies will either

fold because of their lack of connection to the community or copy what community papers are doing to stay in business. In the end, community newspapers that “do it right and do it well” will still be standing and “the metropolitan papers will go down the toilet if they’re not changing to be more like community papers” Thornton said (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010). A couple of editors said the only thing dailies have on weeklies is frequency of their print product. McNeece believes the community mindset of weeklies is their greatest asset. “The weekly newspapers that are really community-based that focus strictly on hyper-local content are still very strong and growing. Our circulation currently is larger than it’s ever been and we’re seeing trends continuing to go upward even when the national economy has still struggled” (J. McNeece, personal communication, May 19, 2010). As the medium continues to go through change, community newspapers are going to be the ones still standing since they have endured before, Thornton pointed out. “This isn’t the first time this has happened. They said radio was going to kill newspapers. They said TV was going to kill newspapers. None of it killed us; we just had to change” (M. Thornton, personal communication, May 7, 2010).

Summary

Each step of the research process has revealed several important findings. Some of these findings support and others contradict the studies (Pew, Bivings, RJI) on which this research is based. First, the surveys reveal that weekly editors and publishers have not changed the way they do business to put out an online edition. Their biggest operational difference is that weekly editors pay more attention to gathering the news now that Internet editions exist. This finding contradicts the portion of the RJI study that

addresses the demands the continuous news desk has placed on journalists. Participants in this study indicated that their pressures are not as great.

Second, weekly newspaper staffs have not changed much in terms of their makeup nor adjusted much to accommodate the extra work of an online edition. This, too, conflicts another portion of the RJI study in which participants have gotten extensive training to prepare for the online edition. Third, weekly editors offer little to no variation in the type of news content they publish in the print and Web editions. Most of their Internet content is an exact duplicate of what appears in the print edition. Last of all, weekly editors are nowhere near as fearful as daily editors and reporters about the future for their newspapers. This finding also relates to the Pew study component about the pressures the Internet edition has placed on journalists.

Participants in the Pew study are skeptical about the future of their publications. The majority of participants who completed this researcher's study have more optimism. They believe that their print editions are here to stay, and it will be years before the online edition can replace it completely. Lastly, the survey data opposes Bivings results regarding the variations in content that are arising in Internet editions versus print. Participants in this researcher's study expressed that they deem the same types of content important for each edition.

While the survey provided a comprehensive look at weekly Internet editions, the interviews explored why some weekly newspaper editors have successful Internet editions and why some do not. The researcher used semi-structured recorded interviews with the editors across the state as a means of reaching this analysis. The study provides a rationale about what is working for some editors and what is not as well as reasoning

behind why some editors have not adopted an Internet edition yet. Findings show several important factors that are consistent with the survey results. To begin with, weekly editors revealed that journalism is not necessarily better by having the Internet's continuous news desk as RJI participants specified. Instead, they implied that journalism is different. Furthermore, results show that weekly newspaper staffs have not handled their Internet editions as well as journalists surveyed in the RJI study. Their news staffs are not changing as much as Pew participants' staffs. In addition, they are not getting the training journalists in the RJI study are getting nor are they producing the array of content pointed out in the Bivings study. Weekly editors do have more positive outlook about their future than participants in the Pew study. They also tout more advantages they have with having both a print and Internet edition over a daily, larger newspaper. What the majority of them cannot explain is how to make money from their Internet editions.

The interviews also reveal three important categories by which the researcher could group editors – editors whose newspapers are not changing for the Internet, editors whose newspapers are only partly changing, and editors whose newspapers are getting more daring in their Internet practices. It is difficult to sort via age, years in business, etc., of the editors in these categories because the groups appear to contain a mixture of editor traits. The more complacent editors are among those whose newspapers are not changing for the Internet. A majority of the respondents outright declared that their newspaper is acceptable the way it is, and they are not changing their product for the Internet. These editors insisted that their readers would not have access to or desire to read an Internet version of their newspapers anyway, so there was no need to change to give subscribers what editors assume they would not want. What is concerning is that most of these

editors have not taken the initiative to assess the interests of their readers and thus have no idea what their readers want. Editors could be denying their readers a product that could be revolutionized via an electronic format.

The readers are not the only ones being deprived. By sticking to this mindset, these editors are keeping their staffs in a stagnant position in light of the technological developments occurring across the industry. Some editors commented that they do not have the time or skills to attempt an Internet edition. However, those editors who have attempted the Internet edition found that neither the production process nor the learning curve was as involved as they initially thought. This suggests that this group of editors could be focusing so much on what they do not have that they have not even tried to make the most of what they do have. Many are fearful that they will further tax their overextended staffs by adding an Internet edition. However, a few editors have shown that the production process only involves a small amount of minutes or steps a week.

The second category includes those editors narrowly attempting an Internet edition. These editors are copying and pasting word-for-word content that appears in their print edition. Most indicated that they are maintaining the online edition merely to say they have one and that the Web edition is not nearly as important as the print edition. Consequently, they offer no originality on their sites. They do just enough to have an online presence. While they are giving their readers an online experience, that experience is not nearly what it could be. What these editors are offering is the same product twice, which means editors are not viewing the online edition as a separate, equal product. These editors agree that the online edition is important enough to have but not so important that it robs them of the time and energy they should put in the print edition.

Similarly, these staffs are getting minimal exposure to the online production process. A handful of staff members – in most cases two or fewer – handle uploading the content to an off-site server, and the rest of the staff never participate in making the final product. Editors in this category have at least challenged the consensus to try to do something different, though many declare that they have gone as far as they are going to go with their sites. Many see no need to make the sites fancier or interactive because of the slow-speed Internet access in their counties and their perceived limited reader interest in having such sites.

The last category is the smallest group of editors. Very few Mississippi weekly editors are stretching their staffs and their thinking to produce an online edition that could be considered a separate, equal product. Editors have established that material like video and multimedia packages distinguish the more developed sites from the simple ones. Fewer than five newspaper websites across the state include such content. What distinguishes these editors from the others is the level of risk that they have been willing to take with their online editions. Editors in this group confessed that they have at least tried a multitude of items – some worked and some did not – on their websites. Editors insisted that they were going to make the most of the platform and would determine through experience whether their readers wanted the array of content they provided. They would not decide for them that they did not want the content.

Also, these editors have defied myths that it takes a great deal of time and money to have sophisticated websites. Editors are using the people that they have and utilizing the fewest resources that they can to produce the online content. They report that extensive training is not needed to extend a website beyond a cut-and-pasted site. In most

instances, these editors have taught themselves to put together the multimedia features. Then, they pass that knowledge on to other staff members.

Another aspect to consider when examining weekly editors' comments is their claims that daily newspapers will become extinct or will have to resort to follow what they are doing to stay alive. Remarks indicate that weekly editors are not really doing anything inventive. In fact, most are producing their newspaper the same way that they have for years. The only distinction, which has to some extent always been a difference, is that weeklies focus more on community people and less significant news. This difference is important enough to cause dailies to lose circulation and reader interest. However, it is not so significant that dailies could not redirect their focus and recover readers and interest.

Additionally, weeklies do not face nearly the same challenges as dailies. Dailies have larger staffs to support, more area to cover, and a more diverse audience to please. The market for weekly newspapers is smaller and does not consist of as many online readers as the daily newspapers' market. Weekly subscribers are used to reading print newspapers. Also, most dailies have taken more risks than weeklies. They have at least tried to have an online edition, and some are striving to make the sites so sophisticated that they require a greater effort from a larger portion of their staff than weeklies' staffs to produce. Therefore, in many ways weeklies cannot compare to dailies, and it would be unwise to think that dailies should be as successful as weeklies.

The next chapter contains the results of the final stage in this research process – a case study that showcases one weekly as a model of how to successfully manage the print and online editions and make money from them.

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Inside *The Wayne County News* Newsroom

A frantic call comes across the telephone line from the Wayne County fire chief. A poisonous gas pipeline has exploded to the west of town. With only two editorial staff members at the Wayne County newspaper, the least busy journalist rushes out of the office to cover the story. It so happens that the writer heading to the scene is also the county chairman of the emergency planning board, so he knows everyone who will be working the scene and happens to supervise their organizations. As emergency crew work the scene, the writer calls back to the newspaper office to dictate to the staff what is happening on the scene. The staff posts a brief to their newspaper website immediately as breaking news. Simultaneously on location, firemen check their ringing cell phones to read up-to-date briefs of what they are doing at the pipeline break. They are all subscribers to the newspaper website.

Spurts of sparse coverage of the event continue as the reporter remains on site. Cell phones signal updates every other minute. When the journalist spots the first firefighters heading back to town, his close connection to them makes it easy to beckon them to take video he has shot while there to the newspaper office on their way into town. In a matter of minutes, video coverage of the event graces the home page of the newspaper website. The reporter is still on the scene. Give the reporter time to get back to the office and a complete video and a full story appear as breaking news on the site.

It only took a phone call and a Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera, tools journalists have lugged in the field with them for years, to achieve this coverage. Before now, no

one at weeklies has thought to use them in the ways this reporter has nor has the equipment been advanced enough to allow them to do so. Additionally, the advent of the Internet in the late 1990s has opened a door for newspapers to showcase such events almost as they occur. To be able to provide coverage so quickly and so innovatively is monumental for a weekly newspaper, the reporter Sean Dunlap recalls. “For a weekly, it made us a daily. It made us on the spot. It’s really transformed the way we do this,” he said (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Nearly 17 years have passed between when the first full-content Internet edition surfaced and the *Wayne County News*’ inventive coverage for its market. Newspaper editors have struggled with ways to keep up with the immediacy this new format affords and how to make money with it. It has taken this long for Mississippi weeklies to figure out that they can offer this type of continuous news coverage and that this new medium can be profitable for them. *The Wayne County News* is one of less than a handful of weekly Mississippi newspapers that have gone to a 24/7 newsroom like the one mentioned in the 2009 RJI study on which this study is modeled. This case study explores the experience of that weekly newspaper’s undertaking of an Internet edition. It shows primarily that *The Wayne County News*’s handling of their Web edition is consistent with RJI study respondents’ beliefs that a continuous news desk has made journalism better for them. In fact, publisher Paul Keane favors it so much that he is puzzled as to why other newspapers will not take advantage of its benefits. This case study will address how this weekly newspaper has handled the challenges of four other areas spotlighted in the RJI study: the impact of the Internet newspaper on journalism in general, the continuous news desks’ impact on deadlines and overall newspaper operation, the treatment of the

print and online news products as integrated or separate entities, and how newspapers train their staff for the online edition.

The Wayne County News has been in continuous operation since 1890. The newspaper has had an online edition for five years, but the staff retooled it a year ago to make it more lucrative, Keane explained. It is one of few newspapers in Mississippi whose publisher believes they are working with two separate, equal products – a print edition and an electronic one. Keane, 46, has been in the newspaper business 32 years and at his current newspaper six of those years. As the publisher of *The Wayne County News* in Waynesboro, he holds the responsibility of leading the one-day-a-week print publication. The locally-owned newspaper has a circulation of 4,500. Its only competition in the town is a shopper newspaper. A shopper is a newspaper whose dominant content is classified and display advertising.

At last U.S. Census Bureau count, *The Wayne County News* served a population of 5,197 people or 1,983 households. Five hundred and seventy households earned less than \$10,000 per year. The median household income in the town was \$22,357. The median age of the town was 32.9. Of the total families, 427 were below the national poverty level, and 293 households had no telephone service (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

The first area of this case study focuses on how *The Wayne County News* has dealt with the impact of the Internet newspaper on their journalism in general. In the RJI study, a majority of editors and reporters thought the Web, with its continuous news capability, has improved print and online journalism. For *The Wayne County News*, the Internet has not made their journalism better necessarily, but it has made it more diverse, according to Keane. Where weeklies were limited once in what they covered, they are

able now to offer a product that they previously had not. Dunlap and Keane, who are the manpower behind the news side of *The Wayne County News* operation, said the Internet has changed them into more than a newspaper. They consider their weekly a multimedia operation in which they run a newspaper, television station, and radio station all in one.

The newspaper started offering live streaming audio coverage of its local high school sporting events through its website in 2009. Dunlap does all the broadcasts on location via a Bluetooth headset and cell phone. He attends the academy high school football games and broadcasts them as if he was on radio. The public high school games were already being broadcast from the local radio station, but the private school had never been on the radio. The broadcasts, called Teamline, were a way for the newspaper to serve that area of the community that was not being served. Dunlap goes on location and records the games by speaking into his cell phone. His broadcasts include not only a play-by-play retelling of the events but everything from talk shows to stand-ups. In the lull time of the games, Dunlap initiates prerecorded commercials that he and Keane created to be played. Businesses pay for advertising spots during the ballgames, and Dunlap disperses them throughout. Because the advertisements are prerecorded commercials, Dunlap can simply press a few keys – *01 – on his cell phone to signal to his cell phone to play the ads. The computer automatically plays the commercial and cuts off his microphone. When it is time for Dunlap to come back on the air, he hears a tone and begins broadcast again. All of this is done with two simple, everyday pieces of equipment. Dunlap, who has done radio broadcasts for years, remembers when sound equipment was as big as an office desk and it was much harder to record shows.

“When I was in radio, we used to have these two big gym bags you had to carry with equipment in it, but this is the technology now,” Dunlap said (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

In addition to the radio broadcasts at the games, Dunlap shoots pictures and records video with his SLR for use as part of a full video package on the website later. The newspaper produces five video shows a week during football season. Dunlap spends a typical night after a football game taking all the pictures and video he shot back to the newsroom and works until 2 a.m. or later Saturday morning with Keane to get a full stats package, full story, and photos all on the Internet. They put in the extra hours so that when subscribers awake the next day, the entire package will be in the newspaper and online. They have even done 30-minute TV shows and five-minute practice shows in their coverage – all this on top of their regular newspaper and other duties. Dunlap said that the local radio station gives residents the story but ignores individual accomplishments like how many rushes or tackles a player gets. That is where their newspaper fills the gap. The two admit that the extra coverage can be overwhelming, but it is doable if a newspaper wants to do it. They do it because their residents like it and they have done it so well that it is what residents have come to expect, Dunlap explained.

He said, “This area is really fanatical about the things that they like. We give them something that nobody else can give them. They have come to view this as having their own TV show. We’re not CBS, and yes the video doesn’t look super smooth but it’s what people are looking for right here” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Dunlap explained that the process for recording the commercials is as involved as the broadcasts. Keane and Dunlap go out one day and shoot all the commercials. Dunlap, who has a radio background, can write the script for a business. Then he will sit down and voice the scripts. Keane puts video to the script, and the commercial is complete with the work of just two journalists. Dunlap's and Keane's efforts have been so lucrative that they were able to move into a new building in November 2009 despite a national economic downturn and are so successful that nearby television stations have come to rely on their website for coverage. But business from the website has not always been so profitable for them. They, too, faced some of the same challenges, such as lack of time and resources, that other newspapers faced when starting Internet editions. The newspaper started with much the same format as other weeklies – a Web page where they uploaded and posted stories into a template. However, the need to keep on top of technology and stay competitive drove them to revamp themselves. Now they have the traditional website and an e-edition of PDFs that are only available to subscribers. Keane insists that their audio broadcasts, videos, and breaking news coverage set their online coverage apart from other weeklies.

A project the newspaper did in fall 2010 is to reserve a local pizza business and invite the two head high school football coaches (public and academy), who have never played each other or never even gotten together for anything, to have a discussion. They invited residents to come, have dinner with the coaches, and write questions for them to answer on air. Keane and Dunlap selected the questions from those submitted, read them over the air and let the coaches answer them. If a resident's question was chosen, he won a free pizza from that business. They audio- and videotaped the hour-long show, so the

first day subscribers could hear the audio broadcast of it through the website and the next day they could see the video coverage of the event. It was a way to generate traffic for the business and promote the newspaper at the same time. It cost the restaurant owner nothing but to feed the coaches and the newspaper staff. It cost the newspaper nothing but time. A venture like this is something Keane and Dunlap never thought possible for their website. Yet, they say it is projects like this that weeklies have to be willing to do to grow. “We’ve learned and we’re growing from it. If you’re stuck in a rural part of Mississippi, you need to be able to do this. You’ve got to” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

The Wayne County News’ audio-video coverage has expanded so much that the police now call the newspaper when an event occurs and reminds them to bring the video camera on site, Dunlap said. Despite the new endeavors they are doing with the website, the two are still using the website for everyday items like obituaries, which are updated daily, and events as simple as fire department plug flushings. For the plug flushings, the city has never had a way to let the public know when and where they would be doing the flushings until the website was inaugurated. With the new technology, the newspaper was able to run announcements to remind residents to check the website each day to see which neighborhood would be flushed. They also posted maps of the city on which they circled the area of the county where the flushings would happen. In addition, the staff members put reminders in the print edition for residents to check the website to see which areas would be affected.

Keane and Dunlap profess that the newspaper is the television and radio station for the county now. Even though they already have an AM-FM local radio station, they

maintain that they do a lot more than the automated enterprise that only has someone in office in the morning but nobody there the rest of the day. In these respects, the Internet has changed the way *The Wayne County News* does business and the way its staff views the business. Keane pointed out critical comments he gets from other editors who insist that newspapers are a printed medium and should remain that way. He insists that newspapers are “media outlets now” and must evolve to stay viable.

We’re just like television. We’re just like radio because the Internet has changed the whole playing field. Until we, as newspapers, get that mindset, it’s not going to work. We’re not going to make any money. Somebody else is going to come in and pluck stuff off our websites, aggregate it, put it together on their website and make the money we should’ve been making. (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010)

The second area of the RJI study that the staff dealt with is how they would adjust to this new medium. Respondents in the RJI study noted that the Web edition increased the deadline pressure they face, but those journalists seemed to have handled the challenges of multimedia journalism well. In *The Wayne County News*’s case, it took new technology and training to get the staff ready for the Web edition. The newspaper lost no positions when they adopted the online edition. The staff is so small that Keane does not consider them to have an organization big enough where noticeable changes could have made a difference. Before moving into their new building, the staff was operating with old technology so old that they could not put Flash player software on them. Keane knew if he wanted to remain relevant to the community, the newspaper had to try some things they had never tried. Keane never considered how the staff would react to an online

edition; he just knew how important it was to have one. “I was going to do it no matter what. I never really factored in what they thought. I guess they thought that he’s the boss, so we’re going to follow him,” Keane recalled. “Our first thought was to get better coverage to our community, and that’s why we launched it” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Once the staff had the equipment to go online, the publisher assumed most of the task of dealing with deadlines and pressure. There was minimal change to the staff operations since Keane took the responsibility of maintaining the online site upon himself. He did so to prevent overloading the staff of five with more work. Like many publishers, Keane saw the site as a way to expand their coverage. However, getting both editions out every week is no easy feat. Besides Keane, Dunlap is the only other person on the editorial staff responsible for providing content for the website. They have both learned to write copy for print and online. In this way, the newspaper coincides with the part of the RJI survey in which the reporters surveyed were shown to be capable of writing for both formats. Keane handles the task well despite splitting his time between editorial, management, and advertising duties.

As the website got off the ground, the staff (which also includes three other employees – one who sells the ads, one who does bookkeeping, one who posts the ads) got excited once they started getting positive comments from the community about it, according to Keane. To get the site out, the staff members send same the same PDFs that they send to their printer to their website provider that processes them and gets them ready for posting on the website. Anyone can view the breaking news, but one needs a subscription to access the PDF content.

The online edition has not increased the workload of all the staff, just Keane and Dunlap, who produce content for it. The edition has increased the frequency with which they tell the news and pay attention to it. For instance, breaking news stories used to have to wait a week to be printed in the print edition and deaths would not be reported for a week, which would often be after the funeral. Now online editions can provide both instantaneously. Accordingly, Keane calls it senseless for weekly staffs to only update their Web newspapers once a week. He said the changing desires of subscribers demand the industry to change and thus update more frequently. The rumor mill and the coffee shop gossip have been accelerated by the Internet, he added.

“People now live in a society where they want their news instantly,” Keane said.

People know if we throw something up on Monday, when it comes out Thursday they know we’re going to have more information. In our industry, we think people are dumb, but they’re not. For so long, we were the only game in town and everybody believed that. (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010)

Therefore, the workload for *The Wayne County News* has not increased much and the organizational culture has remained what it was. Keane says changes in the organizational culture, as a result of adopting an Internet edition, are mostly problems for corporate newspapers. “Corporate newspapers don’t embrace change all that much. One of the reasons we’ve been successful is because I don’t have to sit here and run my ideas through six or seven different supervisors or vice presidents and then they sit on it, analyze it, and they do everything else,” said Keane. “We have the attitude here that if it sounds like a good idea, we’ll try it. If it doesn’t, we’ll back up, make a u-turn, whatever we need to do and change it” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Having worked in newspapers for years, Keane and Dunlap know the diligence it takes to put out a newspaper and expected a little extra work from the online edition. Dunlap said, “I come from small newspapers. That’s been my life. You have to hustle. The immediacy is there, but it also gives you so many opportunities to do so many different things” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Dunlap said other weekly editors are fearful of taking the kinds of risks his newspaper has had to take. The staff understands that they have a big market consisting of traditional subscribers who want the physical paper and a younger audience who want to see articles on the Internet. They are working to accommodate both despite what their colleagues say. “They (other editors) see us as never going home, but that’s not true. To tell you the truth, I used to do that without the Internet. A lot of these small newspapers see all this, but the work is on the front end and getting it set up” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Keane added that tradition and unwillingness to change or try new things will continue to keep some newspapers stagnant. He said if some editors and publishers depended on old ways of thinking, they would still be cutting and pasting their pages or resorting to even earlier methods of publication. “We (the newspaper industry) are in a rut. Instead of launching something on your website, most editors revert to what they have always done – another special section to sell. You keep going to go back to the same people you always go to and eventually they burn out” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

The third area of the RJI study involved whether newspapers editors were treating the print and online news products as integrated or separate entities. An overwhelming

majority of the journalists in the study said that their organizations operate the website and print newspaper as an integrated product tailored to different formats, rather than treat them as separate and distinct entities. *The Wayne County News* treats each publication as one integrated product on different formats. The newspaper staff uses much of the same content in both formats and approaches them in the same way when it comes to generating revenue. The minor differences are that the print edition offers an expanded version of teasers placed on the website. At the same time, it includes more detailed feature stories and investigative pieces that an online reader would not take the time to read. Alternatively, the online edition presents more breaking news, video, and audio packages that are not in print. It also includes a vast number of pictures compared to their print edition, which limits the space they have to run photos.

One of the secrets of Keane's success with the Web edition is making the production process as easy on himself as possible. The first thing he does is integrate the content or put the same content online as in print as much as he can. That eliminates the trouble of having to decide what content should go where. There are obvious items that do not make the print edition, like breaking news that is old news by the time the print edition is published or audio-video broadcasts that are not possible in the print edition. He makes up for that by promoting the audio-video broadcasts in the print edition. Besides that, Keane puts everything in print online. He says cross promotion is the key. "Why do you want to shortchange any of your readers? If I withhold one or the other, my reader will feel shorted, especially since we're charging for the website" (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

According to Keane, many newspapers want to tease the readers using the website to drive the reader to the print edition, because they are not charging for the website. “So they have to get revenue from somewhere,” Keane said. “Why not figure out a model to generate revenue on your website and you don’t have to worry about it? Then you can throw everything up there” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Keane, who examines other newspaper websites about once or twice a week, believes his newspaper compares favorably to others. He admits that there are some items he would like to emulate from other websites. For the most part, he sees no difference in content with print and online for most of the newspapers he views. The main difference is in the amount of content most newspapers are offering, he said, explaining that most newspapers do not put as much content in their Web edition as their print.

He said the daily obituaries, videos, and audio are keeping people coming back to their site. The newspaper averages over 1,000 page views per day or 11,000 unique visitors per week. Keane does not count hits because “they just mean somebody opened the Internet and went to our page automatically. It doesn’t mean that they stayed on it or did anything with it” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010). Instead, he gauges unique visitors or people who visit the website once within 24 hours. If a reader visits the website more than once in a 24-hour period, that person is still only counted once, Keane explained. Once identified as a unique visitor, that person is monitored by page views. The greatest interest on the site is in obituaries and breaking news, Keane pointed out. A majority of the people interested in the news are residents who work off shore or natives who have moved out of town. All use the online edition as a way to stay in touch with their hometown. When Keane’s son was stationed in Iraq, he was able to

watch the hometown high school football games on the website. There is so much interest in the site because “we’ve got stuff on our website that attracts people” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

The company that hosts *The Wayne County News*’s website broke their mold when they took on the newspaper site. The newspaper started with 10,000 unique visitors a month and soared to 38,000-40,000 during football season. Traffic goes off the chart during football season, Dunlap said. Now the company recommends their newspapers to others as a model of what to do to generate traffic. “It’s something a lot of people talk about, but they’re absolutely scared to death to try to do. People are so scared to jump off into something,” he said of other editors’ trepidation (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Moreover, Keane mentioned complaints he gets from other newspaper editors who insist that they have to have their newspapers on the Internet but do not want to do what it takes to make it happen or pretend to not have a clue about how to go about it. His advice to them is to treat the Web edition like the print edition in terms of making money from it. He added that until newspapers figure out that the Web edition takes no less effort than the print, they are going to struggle making money on their websites.

I want to tell them that if you treated your print edition like you treat your website, you’d go out of business in six months. How did you build your print edition? You got out there, you tried new ideas. You did things. What makes you think you’re going to be able to do something different with your website and it makes you money? You’ve got to go out and do the exact same thing. It’s just a different forum. (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010)

With regard to the fourth area of the RJI study involving training in which editors and reporters told researchers that their news organizations have provided training, *The Wayne County News's* preparation was not so expansive. Participants in the RJI study said they got training in writing, graphics, layout, or design for Web publishing over a three-year period. Keane said his newspaper staff did not need much training since anyone skilled enough to work on a print newspaper staff can work on the online edition. He said the basics one needs is good writing and an ability to think beyond traditional ways of putting out a newspaper. Keane says it is a challenge to stay on top of ever-changing technology, but all the training comes through trial and error on his part. He learns a new skill and passes it on to the staff members who need to know it.

Keane also declares that he did not spend much time studying what to do on the Internet. Most of their operation has been trial and error. The advice he gives hesitant editors and publishers is to jump in to the process and do not waste a great deal of time studying it and how they are going to approach it. "The Internet changes hourly. You don't have time to study it. Just do it and the beauty of it is if you mess up, you take it down and you do something different. Nobody knows the difference" (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

According to Keane, the newspaper does not rely on a great deal of fancy or expensive equipment to operate or to stay on top of technology. Though the newspaper upgraded all its computers with audio-video editing capabilities at the start of 2010, the staff always searches for cheap technology that meets their needs. For example, their initial investment to add video on the website was \$500, and they do sports audio and video broadcasts with a cell phone. Dunlap added that the initial cost to set up everything

is the greatest expense. After that, it is just a matter of maintaining it with a nominal fee. If the staff does not have the money to do something, they look for a way to do it that costs less or nothing at all. Keane stated, “we have limited resources so it’s a challenge to stay on top of the technology, which is changing constantly” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Lastly, this case study addresses an area not mentioned in the RJI study and that is how newspapers are making money from their websites. Keane confesses that what their newspaper is doing is producing profits for them. He gets hundreds of phone calls from people all across the nation wanting to know how they handle their website edition. Perhaps, the most important lesson a weekly or any newspaper needs to learn in order for the Web edition to be profitable is that they must build a market for it, both men explained. They admit that when they launched the site, it was a piecemeal website because they were just trying to get people in their county to understand what the Internet was. Dunlap said that website usage in places like Mobile, Jackson, and Hattiesburg is greater because the people there have more disposable income and a little better education and thus understand the Internet. According to them, their residents knew what the Internet was, but they had to spend some time showing them its uses. Once they did that, the Web generated a great deal of talk and traffic and consequently revenue for them. Dunlap said, “It’s been an educational process for the last couple of years. Now they [subscribers] know where to go and look for things. That’s where the patience comes in. You have to build a market for it, and that’s the toughest thing in a rural area” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

The two also state that they had to educate other editors as to how they could take those applications and make money with them. The first step was rethinking the way they had been making money. Editors were accustomed to generating 30% profit margins or better solely through advertising, said Keane. “Wal-Mart has never made a 30% margin on anything; they make up for it with volume. Why can’t we do the same thing? We price ourselves out of stuff,” he said (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010). The two assert that the mindset of editors has been if something (the Internet edition) does not produce immediate revenue, they do not want to have any part of it. “You have to drag some people kicking and screaming into it. When you look at our Web page, you don’t see a lot of ads,” said Dunlap, pointing to the fact that they do not rely exclusively on advertising for Web revenue (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

There are other streams that *The Wayne County News* taps to make money. The first way the newspaper produces revenue is from online subscriptions. Since retooling their website, the *Wayne County News* has become a paid subscriber-based website. A visitor to the site can see some parts of the website free, but if he wants the bulk of the website he has to be a paid subscriber. Keane says offering some content for free has been advantageous for their print revenue. Their rack sales have not gone up or down by 50 papers in any one week in the last 52 weeks, said Keane. Other than the normal economic challenges, the newspaper has not seen a drop in their print revenue, he added. Yet, the newspaper increased their overall revenue 15% in the past 12 months because of the website, he continued. The cost of a 12-month subscription to both editions is \$42 for in-county readers and \$57 for those out of town. In- or out-of-county seniors over age 50 get a discount on all their subscriptions unless they want the Web subscription only. The

price of the 12-month Web subscription is \$24. The newspaper has close to 300 subscribers to the online edition alone. Subscriptions to the 12-month printed product only are \$30 for an in-county reader and \$45 for out-of-county. Despite economic crisis from 2008-2010, the newspaper did not see their print subscriptions dwindle. Keane said, “We’ve seen a significant increase in revenue from our website subscriptions. So you cannot convince me that the Internet is going to kill my print edition. So why should we be so scared of the Internet?” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Online advertising only accounts for a minor portion of the online revenue. The average number of ads on the website any given week is two. The prices of those vary based on the time they need to run, size, and features. One of the principal revenue streams is special projects. The newspaper generated \$27,000 to \$37,000 on their audio-visual football coverage last year, according to Dunlap. That was unbudgeted income that they had not anticipated getting. “That’s found money, and it hasn’t taken away from the print edition” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Keane explained how the newspaper charges for and makes money from video coverage. He or Dunlap takes his cell phone to record a game at a cost to them of \$40 a game. They sell one advertising package to a business for one ball game for \$75, garnering a \$35 profit. After he sells the first one, the others are sheer profit. He typically sells five packages. On another occasion, the local softball team was in a best-of-three series tournament one weekend. The publisher pitched the idea to businesses of paying for audio commercials during the event – five spread throughout every game for the three games – for \$75. At the most, it cost the newspaper \$120 (\$40 for each game) in expense using the cell phone and audio broadcast. They sold five slots to five business, grossing

\$375 minus the \$57 cost of commission to his sales rep. They earned \$120. Out of that venture, the newspaper generated \$200 profit, or a 53% margin. Keane said, “So actually, we’re making better margins and selling the product for less because we found technology to make it cheaper” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

With the website provider the newspaper uses, they run all their video through YouTube, use the embed code on their website, and it cost them nothing to put video on the website. Then they sell commercials around the shows when they post them online. The business is only out of commissions to sales rep from one endeavor. In another venture – a typical Friday show where they do highlights from Friday night football games, the newspaper sells four sponsorships at a \$100 each per week minus \$60 for commission to the sales rep. They gain an 85% margin. So Keane has found nontraditional ways to make the Internet produce profits for them. From a business standpoint, he says he comes out much better than in print. For example, to print 4,500 copies of one page of his newspaper cost \$80. To place that same page on website cost the newspaper \$1. He stressed, “From a business standpoint, what are you going to do? You make more money with less expense from the Web” (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Another stream of revenue comes from pictures. Keane and Dunlap take photos of an event and post all of them online, compared to print where they can only print a few. Subscribers can purchase the pictures online in a variety of sizes. An off-site company prints the photographs and mails them to the buyer. That company gets a percentage and the newspaper gets a cut of the costs. For example, a 4x6 photo costs \$4 online. The newspaper and the printing company may get \$1.50 each. The remaining funds go to the

actual cost of the photograph. This is a stream that editors have not considered, said Dunlap. “They’re looking at advertising,” he said. “What you’ve got to do is look at all the opportunities to do these types of things. You have to diversify because of your audience” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

According to Keane and Dunlap, some of their colleagues have criticized them for handling their Web edition the way they do. They have no plans of quitting because it is working for them. Their efforts are a testament to the motto that rests atop their Web page – “Thrives Because It Serves.” “Other editors have said ‘we don’t want to do what you’re doing.’ I’m just doing what we can do in the allotted time we’ve got,” Dunlap said. “Is it going to be ESPN quality? No, but people will appreciate it for what it is. It’s something they’ve never had before” (S. Dunlap, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Despite the newspaper success with the Web edition, Keane does not believe his newspaper will ever be solely online. He says the limited Internet access in rural areas will keep the print newspaper in demand in his county and others like it. In Wayne County, only 20% of the residents are wired for high-speed Internet. The county was in contention for one of the stimulus grants from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to expand their broadband coverage but did not get the grant. Keane says there is tremendous potential that the news can reach more people when Internet access in that area is more widespread.

All things considered, Keane declares that the greatest advantage to the weekly having both editions is that makes them a daily paper and so much more. “People now know when something big happens, they can go to *The Wayne County News* and find out

about it now. Now if you want to know what's going on in Wayne County, you can go to one spot and get it all... And I still have people in my industry telling me I'm a fool for doing it" (P. Keane, personal communication, June 11, 2010).

Summary

This case study addressed how one weekly newspaper has handled the challenges of producing an Internet edition along with a print newspaper. *The Wayne County News's* example shows that it is possible for weeklies to have both editions and to manage them successfully. Their story partly supports one portion of RJI results in which journalists reported that the Internet edition has improved journalism for them. Observations, data, and interviews in this part of the study revealed that the Internet has not necessarily made journalism better, but it has made it more diversified. Results were consistent with an additional part of the RJI study that indicated that journalists have found that the continuous news desk of the Internet had increased the deadline pressure they now face, and journalists have handled the challenges well. Likewise, the participants who work on the Internet edition in this study have found a system that works for them and have adjusted accordingly.

Findings also support an additional part of the RJI study whereby journalists' organizations treat their website and print newspaper as an integrated product tailored to different formats, rather than treat them as separate and distinct entities. *The Wayne County News* treats each publication as one integrated product in that they spread the same content across both and view them similarly. However, the newspaper staff has made strides to offer different content in both products and make money in nontraditional ways with them. In terms of the last major area of the RJI study regarding journalists

getting training for the Internet edition, results from this study reveal that the training is not so purposeful or extensive at *The Wayne County News*.

Last of all, this newspaper is one of the few in the state to support the Bivings results in which there are more variations in content in Internet and print editions. *The Wayne County News*'s content is changing for the online format through trial and error, and they are among the minority of newspapers in the state that are making money from their Internet editions.

The Wayne County News is certainly an innovator in online production among weekly newspapers in Mississippi. They have done everything that the majority of weekly editors said weekly editions could not do. They produce an inventive online newspaper with content that is supplemental to the print edition using minimal resources (people and money). The newspaper staff has done this so long and so successfully that they have established that they could have two separate products. At the same time, the staff has managed to transform their print market to a print-online market and to educate their subscribers about online newspapers' possibilities.

The Wayne County News editors did not assume that the newspaper market or staff wanted to remain the way they were. Even though the newspaper was not experiencing problems with circulation or reader interest, editors believed adopting an Internet edition was something they had to do. Their leadership took a chance that the staff members could produce both editions on different platforms using the people and tools they had. *The Wayne County News* is no different from any other weekly in the state in terms of makeup and challenges. The newspaper is as small staffed, as rural, and as limited in its community Internet access coverage as all other Mississippi weeklies.

However, the newspaper's management has chosen to make the best out of what they have and in return have propelled the publication to become a respected print-online newspaper that others are looking to as a model. The next chapter is a conclusion that presents a discussion of all the research data, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined the experiences of Mississippi weekly newspaper editors and publishers with Internet newspapers. The results present some notable findings that both support and contradict the three studies – Pew Research, Bivings Group, and RJI – on which this research was modeled. Six research questions, formed to address newspaper operation, staff, content, and costs/finances, guided the study. Research questions were: (RQ1) How have Mississippi weekly newspapers changed their operation processes to publish Internet editions? (RQ2) How have Mississippi weekly newspaper staffs evolved to publish an online edition? (RQ3) How is content changing from print editions to Internet versions in Mississippi weekly newspapers? (RQ4) How much is it costing Mississippi weekly newspapers to publish an Internet edition and how much are they making from them? (RQ5) What barriers do Mississippi weekly newspaper editors believe there are to publishing Internet editions in non-metro communities? (RQ6) What do Mississippi weekly editors foresee as the future of Internet newspapers in the state? This three-phase research process consisted of a quantitative electronic survey of Mississippi weekly newspaper editors, semi-structured interviews with 25 weekly newspaper editors, and a case study of one weekly newspaper that is effectively managing a print and online edition.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The research reveals that editors have had contrasting encounters with Internet editions. Based on their experiences, editors can be grouped in one of three categories – those whose newspapers have stayed away from Internet editions altogether, those who

have barely experimented with them, and the few who have made full-fledged commitments to an Internet edition. All the editors admitted to having struggled with how to have both a print and online edition. Most questioned if an online edition was worth the time and money newspaper staffs would have to put into them. Those editors whose newspapers do not have an Internet edition blamed their status as a weekly paper as the reason for the lack of one. Editors said that weeklies do not have the time or resources that a daily newspaper has to produce an online newspaper. Therefore, they contend that it is more acceptable when weeklies do not have Internet editions. As a result, this group of editors has barely explored Internet editions. Some do not have an Internet edition, nor do they have any intentions of ever having one. Besides blaming the lack of resources, these editors attribute readership disinterest and limited Internet access in their rural areas for why they have not or will not pursue an online edition.

Another portion of these editors have scarcely experimented with an Internet edition. These editors have an online edition, but their online newspapers are scaled back editions that contain little variance from their print edition. This group recognizes that some of their market reads the online edition and, so, gives their subscribers just enough online content to proclaim that they have an Internet edition. While they have tapped into their potential, most of these weeklies have declared that they cannot do more than they are already doing with the sites because of small staff sizes and lack of time and other resources.

On the other hand, a third group of editors have shown that it is possible for a weekly newspaper, despite its limited resources, to have both a printed and online newspaper. Those editors have seen the importance of the Internet editions and have

adjusted their operations and content to have them. These newspapers have maintained the same staff members they had with the print edition, but they are not overloading those workers with the burden of producing the online paper. In most instances, only one or two people produce content for the Web edition, but these few people have tried so many different techniques for engaging their readers that they have found a production system that works for them. Their examples illustrate that a weekly can be profitable with both editions.

Research results are consistent with and contrary to outcomes in the Pew, Bivings, and RJI studies. In response to the first research question that dealt with how weeklies have changed their operational processes to accommodate an Internet edition, findings revealed that Mississippi weekly editors attest that the Internet edition has not made their journalism better, only different. This is evident in the fact that many weekly newspapers have not altered their operational practices much for the Internet edition. This contradicts RJI study results in which the bulk of those journalists agreed that the continuous news of an Internet edition has improved their journalism. At any rate, most Mississippi weeklies have primarily the same workload and organizational structure that they had before implementing an Internet edition. Many editors have only added a couple of hours of work to what they were already doing to accommodate an Internet edition.

If weeklies need to change their operations for the Internet edition and have not, the reason could be tied to how their leadership perceives Internet editions. For several editors and publishers, the Web edition is simply a bonus to the printed version. Some editors do not view the online edition equally or give it the same importance as the print edition. Most Mississippi weekly editors are not enthused about it. In fact, many editors

indicated that their work would flow quicker and they would have less expense without the Internet edition. This leads one to question how much more work is a reasonable amount of time to devote to the Internet edition since some editors complain about the extra effort and other editors handle the additional work with ease.

Consequently, it can be assumed that many weekly editors would be better off without the online edition, especially since almost all the editors stated that their newspapers serve markets where only a small percentage of the population read and have Internet access. It is understandable for weekly editors to agonize over how much more work their staffs should have to put into producing content that most their readership will not access. It is also reasonable that editors would weigh overextending the resources that they already have to produce a Web edition. However, the handful of editors who are not focusing on their lack present a convincing case that weekly newspapers can have successful print and Internet editions if they want to.

In light of the previous finding, it is reasonable to consider that most weekly editors have not given the Internet edition a chance to make their journalism better. Those editors who have not even tried an Internet edition have little room to tout the benefits or disadvantages of an online newspaper. Those editors with cut-and-paste online editions could stand to study their market more to determine if they are giving their readership what they want. Editors who are benefitting the most with both editions have grown to enjoy the different type of journalism that they say they can now produce with their online editions.

Perhaps some Mississippi weekly editors are not having the same productive experience as RJI participants because of their staff or leadership makeup. Weeklies will

likely remain stagnant if leadership does not initiate change, and change will have to come from editors and publishers since this study's participants indicated that management are the ones who initiate most change. The second research question addressed how weekly newspaper staffs have evolved to publish an online edition. Pew results showed newspapers are hiring journalists who are already trained to produce material that can be spread across venues. This finding is contradicted among Mississippi weeklies that are doing little hiring at all. The dilemma is that the existing staffs do not possess the necessary knowledge to produce the Internet editions, and weeklies have been slow to provide them that. So someone has to be trained in this area if weeklies are ever going to begin producing online content effectively.

Another problem is that weekly staffs operate on strict budgets that keep publishers from granting the continuous training they would like for their staffs or from hiring already skilled employees to coach their staffs. Maybe training is not what is really needed. Change will not fully come for weeklies until there is a complete renewal in the mindsets of weekly publishers who are accustomed to producing as much content as they can with as few people as they can. These editors, if they look back on the lifespan of weeklies, have to grasp that conditions are probably not going to drastically change much for them. Their circumstances have not changed a great deal in the years that weeklies have been in existence. Most weekly newspapers have maintained a steady staff of a few people who stay in their same positions for years. Since nearly all these weekly newspapers are family-owned businesses, they are staffed by relatives who have been there for years and have no plans of going anywhere. Editors in these publications are used to doing more with less, so they can hardly use limited staffs and resources as

justification for not producing an online edition. The few models in this study prove that weeklies have survived with less with their printed publications and can survive with online newspapers as well.

The most distinct and important adjustment that weekly editors have made is that most of them recognize that they have to pay more attention to the news now if they are going to have an online edition. Editors with Internet editions responded that they heed local news more nowadays so that they can include that news on their websites. Before Internet editions, editors could let news linger for days before they addressed it to be included in their once-a-week edition. The way weekly editors handle their Internet editions conflicts another of the RJI study results in which journalists reported that they are handling the challenges of Internet editions well. Mississippi weekly journalists are having varying experiences. Each editor has his own system that works for his newspaper. Their only measure of success comes down to how readers respond to their online publications and how much money the newspapers make from the Web edition. This is an area that needs extensive further study.

The third research question addressed how news content is changing from print editions to Internet versions. At Mississippi weekly newspapers, findings are contradictory to Bivings results that showed newspapers were aggressively expanding their website features and experimenting with new technology to attract and keep readers. The content differences on weekly Internet newspapers and printed editions are minute, if there are any at all. Only a few weeklies have taken risks to produce original content for their websites, and even those weeklies have not attempted the extensive interactive features that the Bivings Group participants have. This difference in content could be

attributed to the previous research question results about staffing. RJI participants reported getting training in writing, graphics, layout, or design for Web publishing, but weekly staff members have not been as fortunate. Staff members who work on the Internet editions have not gotten multi-dimensional training to produce content for the Web. Therefore, it is understandable why their content does not differ as much. It is conceivable that weeklies' content is not as diverse because the staffs do not have the skills to make it diverse, and staff members cannot get the skills unless editors provide the training. The few Mississippi weeklies with profitable Internet newspapers would likely argue that training is not the key. Again, the change comes in the thinking of a newspaper's people. For instance, the weekly in the case study demonstrated that much can be done with a few. Having a small staff cannot be used as an excuse for a weekly newspaper to stay in old frames of mind. Their example showed that all it takes to produce innovative content is desire. It could be concluded that those editors who desire an innovative, interactive website will do what it takes to have one.

The fourth through sixth research questions dealt with Internet newspaper production costs and profits, barriers keeping some weeklies offline, and editors' predictions about the future of weekly Internet newspapers. These issues were not addressed in the Pew, Bivings, or RJI studies. However, these are key areas that explain the operation, staffing, content, costs, and revenue issues of Internet editions. In the area of expenses, weekly newspapers do not have to spend an exorbitant amount of money to post content on the Web. All of them pay an offsite hosting company to manage their newspaper sites from their servers, and the average cost of uploading one page of content is \$1 per page. None of the editors have a separate staff that manages the online edition,

so staffing is another area that is not costing weekly newspapers a great deal of money. Hence, it can be determined that all weeklies can afford to have an online newspaper, so cost should not be a deterrent to going online.

The main problem editors have faced regarding Internet newspaper finances is that the vast share of them are naive about how to make money from their websites. Of course, the newspapers can depend on traditional money-making ventures, like subscribers and advertising, to supplement what they are spending on the sites. Few have gone beyond tradition, though. Only a couple of weeklies have discovered untapped revenue with their websites. Those weeklies have found that they can make money with the video and multimedia packages they produce and the photographs that they do not have the space for in the printed edition. If weekly editors saw their online editions as important as their printed newspapers, those staff members would take the time to examine what is working for those weeklies that are making money and implement those features in their own newspaper sites.

Since expense can be eliminated as a factor keeping weeklies offline, tradition and staff size are the greatest obstacles. Weekly editors confessed to struggling to change their staffs' thinking to conceive their publication as a weekly with a daily website. The bulk of the staffs consist of middle-aged journalists who have grown used to business as usual. The fact that some of the journalists belong to the same family means that they share more than the same last name – they also share the same doubts and fears about having an Internet edition. Coupled with tradition, fear was reported as one of the biggest deterrents of weeklies attempting Internet editions. Conceivably, weekly staff members could be reluctant to let go of traditional views because there are few examples of

weeklies that are successfully managing both a printed and online edition. This calls for a revamping of newsrooms and staff members' thinking, but again it must start with leadership. If leadership can show the staff members the advantages of the Internet edition and the ease of operating one, staff members would be more likely to embrace it.

Finally, research revealed that weekly editors generally are supportive of online editions and see them progressively becoming integrated into rural communities. However, their rate of incorporation and acceptance are dependent upon several factors. City and state governments are going to have to invest more in Internet infrastructure to make the Internet available to more households. Nearly every editor who participated said that their counties have considerably low Internet penetration rates. Naturally, residents can access the newspaper websites at public places like libraries, but it is going to take a greater effort for more residents to get the Internet in the comfort of their homes. Equally, more weekly newspaper editors may have to take the role that *The Wayne County News* did in building a market for the Internet edition. This calls for more education on the part of newspapers to get more residents to access Internet editions. *The Wayne County News* staff members showed that it takes building a new market that expects news on multiple formats to generate the greatest interest and returns from an Internet edition. Weekly newspaper editors will have to recognize that most of their residents are out of touch with technology and cannot fathom how the technology could enhance their news experience.

While weekly editors remain in a sort of wait-and-see mode before they decide how to expand their online editions, weekly editors were more optimistic than Pew participants that their Internet editions and the entire newspaper industry have a

promising future. Weekly editors insisted that as long as weeklies serve a market that dailies have overlooked, weeklies will continue to thrive. Weekly editors maintain that they have a product that readers cannot get any place else, and the key to that is their local content. Editors stressed that the push toward being hyperlocal is so great that dailies have grasped it. In light of the hyperlocal aspect, the researcher concludes that weeklies have always been a model for dailies. However, weeklies are not doing anything different than they have always done. They have always produced news with more of a focus on their residents than daily newspapers have. Certainly dailies are weeklies' biggest competition because dailies have the resources to pour into Internet editions and the ability to make more of a frequent connection to their communities. But, dailies face way more challenges than weeklies and, in some respects, cannot even be compared with weeklies. Therefore, it is unreasonable for weeklies to insist that dailies should be more like them.

The findings carry noteworthy meaning for Mississippi weekly newspaper journalism and weekly newspapers' place in the industry. Mississippi weekly editors face struggles that are no different from editors at larger, metropolitan newspapers despite the low Internet access penetration in their rural areas. Weekly editors, like daily editors, have a share of their markets that refuse to pay for Internet content, though many weekly editors are not asking them to pay. It is expected that a new publication, online or print, would encounter some problems as it attempts to make a presence in its market. In that respect, weekly editors are not undergoing an unusual endeavor as they move to put their publications online. On the other hand, Mississippi weeklies should expect some trials that dailies do not face. Weeklies' content, if it continues to mirror what is in their print

publication, cannot be as complex and take as much effort to produce as the content that appears in daily newspapers. Weekly content is catered to reader accomplishments and happenings, and readers supply most of that information to the newspaper. In dailies' need to stay competitive, those newspapers have to take news (usually supplied by a news wire service) that is common amongst most of them to publish and present it in a way that catches readers' attention. Therefore, dailies' content must be more creative and interactive, and they have a greater need for their content to vary than weekly newspapers do.

What is especially different between Mississippi weeklies and newspapers in a larger, daily market is that the larger newspapers do not appear to be dealing with the problem of building a market for their online product that weeklies are experiencing. The reason for that could be tied to Mississippi weekly residents' inexperience with computers and the Internet. In the survey portion of the research, weekly editors said the main obstacle keeping weeklies offline is readers' lack of computer skills, not readers' refusal to go online for the news. Therefore, weeklies are not only struggling to create a new market or train their existing market to be online newspaper readers, they are having to teach readers how to use the computer as much as how to go online for news. Daily newspapers are not spending so much time in this area. A daily newspaper's market is a broader, diverse audience that reads Internet newspaper and utilizes the computer regularly for news. This could also explain why weeklies' operations have not changed much and why dailies' have. Dailies are spending their time handling operational changes specifically dealing with the Internet edition, while weeklies are spending more time training and changing the mindsets of their readers to be online news consumers.

Results also present tremendous challenges for journalism educators who strive to prepare students to be technologically savvy handlers of the news. The majority of weekly editors indicated that, first, they were not hiring many new journalists for their newsrooms. This is disheartening to educators who are graduating young journalists to enter newsrooms. This means that educators will either have to steer these entry-level journalists from pursuing positions in weekly newspaper newsrooms or challenge them to be agents of change. Perhaps if weekly editors and publishers could see the advantages of hiring journalists already trained in the skills that they need to publish online editions, they would welcome more new journalists onto their staffs.

Weekly editors also stated that the main skills a journalist should have to work on an online edition are the basics such as reporting, uploading material to the Internet, and the ability to use a digital or video camera. Those skills are taught in the lower-level courses of most college journalism curriculum. Weekly editors' comments should encourage journalism educators to take a long, hard look at what they are teaching. This presents a challenge for journalism educators either to focus more on the basics and allow the individual news outlets to take students' skills to the next level once students secure employment or to look at the larger, daily newspapers' needs for more interactive content and prepare students in that direction. Educators' encounters with preparing students to produce Internet newspapers is an area that needs further study.

Still, it is understood that in any business, times call for change. In the media industry particularly, news publications and audiences change with new technology. Weeklies that want to survive should adjust accordingly. That does not mean weeklies should abandon their printed edition. It does not mean that weekly staff members should

spend from sunrise to sunset squeezing an Internet edition into their already busy schedules. It means that weekly editors are going to have to rethink how they have thought about the Internet edition and find ways to use it to their advantage. With a small investment in themselves and more attention on their markets, weekly newspapers have the greater chance to make it in this technologically-changing society. In fact, weeklies have been fortunate that they have weathered the conditions that many daily newspapers have succumb to, but these weeklies have not made it because they are conducting business any better than dailies. Weeklies just have not had as great of challenges as dailies.

Weekly newspaper editors could stand to take the time to study seriously their market and the industry to evaluate if they are giving their readers what they desire. Furthermore, editors would benefit by watching what other editors having success with the medium are doing and take guidance from them. Should some weeklies remain in their current conditions, they should expect not expect growth. Granted, weekly newspapers are probably in a better position than daily newspapers to maintain both an online and printed edition successfully. If weekly editors take their advantages into consideration, then certainly change should come from the bottom up.

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, there are several limitations to this study. In regards to the survey, all the editors who started the survey did not complete it. Twenty-seven editors began the survey, but only 23 fully finished it. It could be argued that 23 is not a reasonable number of editors to make generalizations about the data. However, some

researchers have deemed 25% a satisfactory and expected response rate. This study meets that satisfaction.

Second, it is paradoxical to send out an electronic survey to question weekly editors, who may have issues with technology, about a technological aspect like an Internet edition. If editors did not have a Web edition, there was a possibility that they would not get or respond to an emailed survey about Internet editions. That could be the reason that the response rate was not especially high when the Mississippi Press Association sent out their initial request for response. Perhaps, it would have been more appropriate to send out a printed survey as well as the online one. Similarly, since weekly editors reported that they are so pushed for time, they could have ignored the survey altogether sensing that it would have taken too much of their time.

As per the interviews, it could be contended that the researcher did not question enough editors. However, the researcher believed 25 was an adequate number to provide a thorough look into the operations of weeklies with their Internet editions or lack thereof. The researcher was able to detect themes after interviewing only a few of those 25 editors. Last of all, some would question the decision to present a case study on the newspaper that was chosen. There was no scientific data that the researcher could rely on to make the selection, so it only made sense to draw attention to a weekly newspaper that could offer answers to questions other weekly editors had about Internet newspapers and provide an example for them to follow.

Last of all, it is possible that results in this study could vary by location. Some newspapers could be facing competition in their communities from newspapers or other sources and other hindrances that threaten their online presence that other newspapers are

not facing. The availability and sophistication of Internet access in specific parts of the state could determine the ease or difficulty some residents have with accessing Internet editions. Moreover, the demographics of the Wayne County residents in the case study could be contrary to most of the state's residents. This would keep the results from being generalizable and make *The Wayne County News*' story more distinctive.

Recommendations

Although the researcher approached weekly Internet newspaper publication from various angles, there are other research opportunities to be explored. Future studies could address any of the four foundational areas – operation, staff, content, and finances – of this study in more detail. Scholars could use different research methodologies to offer another insight into this issue. Scholars could attempt a mail survey, which could increase response, among weekly editors related to the topic. In addition, scholars could analyze this topic from the viewpoint of newspaper staff members rather than management, which will likely garner different results. Researchers could establish criteria to determine which newspaper would have been best for the case study.

Additionally, in this researcher's effort to garner participation in the interview portion of the study, an untapped area of study was determined. Few studies have been conducted on shoppers or weekly publications that are comprised mostly of advertising. Researchers could see how those newspapers are responding to Internet editions. Further exploration needs to be done into the characteristics of the communities in which some of these newspapers are located. Such resulting data could provide a means for comparing specific newspapers in different parts of the state and determining if location is a factor in weekly Internet newspaper usage and adoption. It would be especially beneficial to study

the Wayne County residents and that city in more detail to pinpoint potential characteristics of that location that could contribute to producing a successful Internet edition. There could be atypical factors that are unique to that region of Mississippi.

Another area of contention for weeklies that scholars could explore is the threat that individuals hosting their own news sites and other news publications in weeklies' target area pose to weeklies Internet newspapers. Finally, it would be remiss to ignore daily newspapers' handling of their Internet editions in the four core areas mentioned in this study. It could be beneficial to conduct interviews with daily newspaper editors to compare how daily editors in the same state or daily newspapers in general feel in response to these findings.

APPENDIX A

MISSISSIPPI NON-DAILY NEWSPAPER EDITOR SURVEY

ABOUT ONLINE NEWSPAPERS

Editor Demographics:

Age _____

Highest level of education completed _____

If college degree, in what area? _____

Number of Years in Newspaper Business _____

Number of Years as Editor of current paper _____

Technological skills that help produce the Internet edition _____

1. Do you have a print and online edition?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. How long have you had a print edition? _____

3. How long have you had an online edition? _____

4. How often is the print edition published?
 - a. Once a week
 - b. Twice a week
 - c. Once a month
 - d. Twice a month
 - e. Other: _____

5. How often is the Internet edition updated?
 - a. Daily
 - b. Once a week
 - c. Twice a week
 - d. Once a month
 - e. Twice a month
 - f. Other: _____

6. Is your newspaper owned by a corporate chain?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. Your newspaper's circulation:
 - ____ Less than 1,000 readers
 - ____ 1,001-2,500 readers
 - ____ 2,500-5,000 readers
 - ____ 5,001-7,500 readers

- ___ 7,501-10,000 readers
- ___ More than 10,000 readers

8. How many hits do you have to your Internet edition every month?

- ___ Less than 500
- ___ 500-1,000
- ___ 1,001-3,000
- ___ 3,001-5,000
- ___ More than 5,000 Indicate how many: _____

9. What is the full-time editorial staff size of your newspaper?

- ___ 1-5 people
- ___ 6-10 people
- ___ 11-15 people
- ___ 16-20 people
- ___ More than 20 people Indicate how many: _____

10. What portion of your staff is allocated to working on the Internet edition?

- ___ 1-5 people
- ___ 6-10 people
- ___ 11-15 people
- ___ 16-20 people
- ___ More than 20 people Indicate how many: _____

11. Rank, in order of importance with 1 being most and 5 being least, the major skills reporters must possess to work on the Internet version?

- ___ Ability to use a digital/video camera
- ___ Ability to write for the Internet
- ___ Basic reporting skills
- ___ Ability to shoot video
- ___ Audio/video editing
- ___ Uploading material to the Internet
- ___ Ability to put together a slideshow/story package
- ___ Web design/development
- ___ Software experience (Quark, Photoshop, InDesign, etc.)

12. What is the average age of staffers working on the Internet edition?

- a. 18-24
- b. 25-34
- c. 34-44
- d. 45-54
- e. 55 and over

13. What is the average education level of staffers working on the Internet edition?

- a. High school diploma
- b. Community college graduate

- c. Obtained bachelor's degree
- d. Obtained master's degree
- e. Ph.D. or higher

14. Is your newspaper training existing staff with the technological skills necessary to put out an Internet edition or are you hiring people with these skills to publish the Internet edition?

- a. Training existing staff
- b. Hiring people
- c. Both

15. If you are training, what area is your newspaper training staff in more?

- ☐ Ability to use a digital/video camera
- ☐ Ability to write for the Internet
- ☐ Basic reporting skills
- ☐ Ability to shoot video
- ☐ Audio/video editing
- ☐ Uploading material to the Internet
- ☐ Ability to put together a slideshow/story package
- ☐ Web design/development
- ☐ Software experience (Quark, Photoshop, InDesign, etc.)
- ☐ Not having to train at all

16. Rank the topics below from 1 to 5, with 1 being most important and 5 being least, that are getting the most coverage in your print edition nowadays?

- ☐ City/state news
- ☐ National/international news
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Opinions
- ☐ Lifestyles
- ☐ Religion
- ☐ Local/community
- ☐ Classifieds

Other: _____

17. Rank the topics below from 1 to 5, with 1 being most important and 5 being least, that are getting the most coverage in your online edition nowadays?

- ☐ City/state news
- ☐ National/international news
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Opinions
- ☐ Lifestyles
- ☐ Religion
- ☐ Local/community

___ Classifieds

Other: _____

18. Rank the topics below from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being least, that are getting the least coverage in your print edition?

___ City/state news

___ National/international news

___ Sports

___ Business

___ Opinions

___ Lifestyles

___ Religion

___ Local/community

___ Classifieds

Other: _____

19. Rank the topics below from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important and 5 being least, that are getting the least coverage in your online edition?

___ City/state news

___ National/international news

___ Sports

___ Business

___ Opinions

___ Lifestyles

___ Religion

___ Local/community

___ Classifieds

Other: _____

20. What topics, if any, are reserved for the online edition? Check all that apply.

___ City/state news

___ National/international news

___ Sports

___ Business

___ Opinions

___ Lifestyles

___ Religion

___ Local/community

___ Classifieds

___ We don't have an online edition.

___ We put all our content on both versions.

Other: _____

21. What topics, if any, are reserved solely for the print edition? Check all that apply.

- ☐ City/state news
 - ☐ National/international news
 - ☐ Sports
 - ☐ Business
 - ☐ Opinions
 - ☐ Lifestyles
 - ☐ Religion
 - ☐ Local/community
 - ☐ Classifieds
 - ☐ We don't have a print edition.
 - ☐ We put all our content on both versions.
- Other: _____

22. News stories on the Internet edition are:

- a. longer than print stories
- b. shorter than print stories
- c. the same size as print stories

23. News stories on the Internet edition are:

- a. Written in the same journalistic news style as the print edition
- b. Written in a format to fit the Internet Describe how:

24. In terms of graphics and illustrations, there are:

- a. more than in the print edition
- b. less than in the print edition
- c. about the same amount as in the print edition

25. Graphics and illustrations are designed:

- a. the same as for the print edition
- b. different from the print edition Describe how:

26. Advertising content is designed:

- a. the same as for the print edition
- b. different from the print edition Describe how:

27. How is your newspaper supporting a print edition? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Subscriptions
- ☐ Classifieds
- ☐ We don't have an Internet edition to finance.
- ☐ We are having trouble financing both editions.

Other: _____

28. How is your newspaper supporting an online edition? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Subscriptions
- ☐ Classifieds
- ☐ We don't have an Internet edition to finance.
- ☐ We are having trouble financing both editions.

Other: _____

29. Does your newspaper offer advertisers package deals for advertising in the print and online editions?

- a. Yes
- b. No

30. Are there any other incentives you use to draw and keep advertisers for the print edition?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If so, please explain:

31. Are there any other incentives you use to draw and keep advertisers for the online edition?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If so, please explain:

32. Do your advertisers:

- a. favor advertising in the Internet edition
- b. dislike advertising in the Internet edition

33. How is your newspaper charging readers for Internet content?

- ☐ Per amount (lines, etc.)
- ☐ Per story/photo
- ☐ One-time access fee
- ☐ Monthly subscription
- ☐ Yearly subscription
- ☐ Minimal additional fee with print subscription

☐ We don't charge for anything.

34. In your opinion, what obstacles are there to publishing online newspapers in non-metro communities? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Lack of reader interest
- ☐ Lack of computer skills of newspaper personnel
- ☐ Lack of computer skills of local readers
- ☐ Lack of development funds

Other: _____

35. Some believe online newspapers are vital to the future of non-daily newspaper publishing. Do you:

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

36. When, if ever, will online newspapers be the sole format for your newspaper publication?

- ☐ Within one year
- ☐ Between 2-5 years
- ☐ Between 6-10 years
- ☐ Between 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years
- ☐ Never

37. When, if ever, will online newspapers be the sole format for newspaper publication in general?

- ☐ Within one year
- ☐ Between 2-5 years
- ☐ Between 6-10 years
- ☐ Between 11-15 years
- ☐ More than 15 years
- ☐ Never

38. ___ percent of my readers would have to report using the Internet as their primary source of news before I would consider abandoning the print edition and publishing solely online.

- ☐ More than 75%
- ☐ Between 51-75%
- ☐ Between 25-50%
- ☐ Less than 25%
- ☐ I would never consider publishing solely online.
- ☐ Our paper is already publishing solely online.

39. Would you be willing to be interviewed briefly further about this topic? This would provide some rationale behind the decisions you have to make in your position.
- a. Yes
 - b. No

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EDITORS-PUBLISHERS OF NON-DAILY

NEWSPAPERS IN MISSISSIPPI WITH INTERNET PUBLICATIONS

1. Full name? Age? Gender? Education level? Years in the business? Years at current paper? Title?
2. Name of paper? City/town located? Local/corporately owned? Circulation?
3. Are you the only newspaper in that city/town? If not, name others (daily/weekly).
4. How often does the print edition come out?
5. Do you have an online edition? How long have you had it? How often is it updated?
6. How did you decide to adopt an online edition?
7. What is your editorial staff size? Are they the ones who work on the Web edition?
8. What changes, if any, did the staff have to undergo to adopt an Internet edition (more staffing, time, etc.)?
9. How important was the attitude of leadership in whether the staff embraced the Internet edition or are still reluctant to it?
10. Explain your process of putting out an Internet edition once a week (or however often you do it).
11. What are the major skills reporters must possess to work on the Web version?
12. What newsroom positions or duties, if any, are being lost/increased as a result of the Internet edition?
13. How has the organizational culture of your newspaper changed since adopting an Internet edition?
14. What are you doing to help the staff stay on top of technological changes?
15. Most weekly newspapers are following their print tradition of publishing once a week and are only updating their websites once a week, unless there is late-breaking news. Do you think weekly newspapers will have to change that model? Why or why not?
16. What do you believe are some of the barriers that are keeping some weekly newspapers offline?
17. How is the community (weekly) newspaper affected by having an Internet edition?
18. How do you decide what news content is best suited for the print edition? Online edition?
19. Do you ever think there will be a day when certain topics should be confined to the print edition and others to the online edition?
20. How often do you view the websites of other newspapers? How do you think your site measures up to what you are seeing?
21. Do you think there is a difference in the content of news stories on the Internet versus the print edition (of newspapers that you are seeing)?

22. How do the Internet stories compare with their print counterparts in terms of quality? Are newspaper stories in general improving/declining as a result of the Internet? Explain.
23. What things do you try to do to make your Internet newspaper appealing?
24. What is the number of hits your newspaper website gets per month? Do you know where these visitors are located?
25. What do you think is keeping readers coming back to your site?
26. Do you offer a way for readers to respond to items online?
27. What is your newspaper doing to boost readership of both editions?
28. In what way(s) are you changing advertising (the look, etc.) for the Internet edition?
29. In terms of amount, how much advertising is online in relation to print?
30. How are you currently charging businesses to advertise on the Internet edition?
31. How do your advertisers feel about the Internet edition?
32. How are you charging readers for Internet content?
33. What implications does charging or not charging for Internet content have on your print revenue?
34. What business model(s) do you have in place to ensure that your newspaper succeeds financially?
35. Where do you think newspapers, in general, are headed financially?
36. What do you predict is the future of Internet newspapers in rural Mississippi areas? Print papers?
37. What fears/concerns/positives do you see about your Internet newspaper?
38. Do you think your newspaper will ever be solely online? Why or why not?
39. What advantage do weekly newspapers have with having a print and Internet edition versus larger, daily newspapers?
40. Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EDITORS-PUBLISHERS OF NON-DAILY

MISSISSIPPI NEWSPAPERS WITH NO INTERNET PUBLICATION

1. Full name? Age? Gender? Education level? Years in business? Years at current paper? Title?
2. Name of paper? City/town located? Local/corporately owned? Circulation?
3. Are you the only newspaper in that city/town? If not, name others (daily/weekly).
4. How often does the print edition come out?
5. What is your editorial staff size?
6. What is the reason that you do not have an Internet edition?
7. How do you feel about having an Internet edition?
8. Do you ever plan on having an Internet edition?
9. How is the community (weekly) newspaper affected by having an Internet edition?
10. What do you think are some of the obstacles/barriers that are keeping other weeklies offline?
11. How often do you view other newspapers' websites?
12. Do you think there is a difference in the content of news stories on the Internet versus the print edition (of what you're seeing)?
13. What is your newspaper doing to boost readership of your print edition?
14. What business model(s) do you have in place to ensure that your newspaper succeeds financially?
15. Where do you think newspapers, in general, are headed financially?
16. What do you predict is the future of Internet newspapers in rural Mississippi areas? Print papers?
17. Do you think newspapers will ever be solely online? Why or why not?
18. Is there anything I haven't asked that you'd like to add?

APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM



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**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
 Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10012801

PROJECT TITLE: **The Experiences of Mississippi Weekly Newspaper Editors as They Consider and Explore Producing Internet Editions**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 07/31/07 to 08/01/10

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Cassandra D. Johnson**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Arts & Letters**

DEPARTMENT: **Mass Communication & Journalism**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **02/10/2010 to 02/09/2011**

Lawrence A. Hosman
 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

2-10-10

Date

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